

AESTHETIC AUTHENTICITY:
CONSUMMATORY EXPERIENCE IN THE
MARKETPLACE

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is about aesthetic authenticity, a construct of the larger concept of authenticity, as it is understood in the context of consumers in the marketplace. My interest in this topic began when I started to study consumer motivations for consumption of goods and services. I felt there was somewhat of an emerging conundrum when I saw marketers advertise products as being “authentic reproductions.” As I will show later in this study, this is a well-known phenomenon and there is a body of work (the academic literature surrounding travel and tourism) which addresses this concept and how it is applied in the marketplace. With regard to music, I found it especially interesting that authenticity in one genre can mean something completely different than authenticity in another genre. Once again, this phenomenon of authenticity has already been addressed within the academic literature surrounding music and performance.

As my interest in this topic continued, I began to see that the topic of authenticity as discussed in the marketing literature was not as well developed as it was in these other academic disciplines. The concept as a whole was clearly being addressed by the leading scholars - “Authenticity is a cornerstone of contemporary marketing... (Brown, et al.

2003)”. However there seemed to be very little agreement in the literature about what it was. In other words, the concept of authenticity would be addressed, it would be shown to be important, but specific explanations or constructions of the concept were not elucidated.

In this study I take that next step. I show how the concept of authenticity has been linked to branding, consumer behavior, been used to legitimize products and services and adds to the market value of consumer products and cultural goods. In these varied contexts, evidence suggests that both researchers and consumers have varying ideas of what authenticity actually means. Grayson and Martinec (2004) articulated indexical (spatio-temporal linkage) and iconic (containing attributes of originality) types of authenticity. However as discussed earlier, this understanding does not adequately address the concept as articulated in the marketing literature. Wang (1999) articulated the concept of existential authenticity in the tourism literature, which comes close to one construct of authenticity mentioned in the marketing literature. Building on this, I suggest aesthetic authenticity as a construct which exists in the marketplace, and which has been a part of the marketing literature for at least a decade but has only been vaguely articulated.

My previous research (Mason, 2007) shows that authenticity is something which consumers seek as a pleasurable experience. In this study, I conceptualize aesthetic authenticity as being evoked by objects or brands having the following four properties: (1) incorporate a carefully controlled image; (2) makes consistent use of symbolic imagery in their advertisements to better control brand image; (3) has a close connection to consumer self-identity; and (4) by its ability to incorporate linkages to consummatory experience (as articulated by the American pragmatist scholar John Dewey.) I then go on to demonstrate

how this consumer demand for aesthetic authenticity is met through the creation of products and services that evoke this construct.

In order to discuss aesthetic authenticity as a sociological concept, this study develops an authenticity typology which addresses both the existential and aesthetic aspect of the concept as a way to link it to social identity. Using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2005) my research is informed by guided interviews where subjects were asked to categorize sets of “authentic” products and services on their own and with little or no researcher input about what or how many categories were present. Afterwards, subjects were interviewed about their rationales for the categorizations they made. This assisted in a better understanding of how consumers identify authenticity in the marketplace, its linkage to brand associations and the potential relationship to their social identities. Additional in-depth interviews were conducted focusing on key factors relating to authenticity that were identified as being relevant to the subjects in the initial phase of the research. Finally, the data presented here hopefully provides a clearer and more complete typology of the authenticity concept. This lays the groundwork for future research on the concept including scale development and other managerially relevant areas.

An Overview of Authenticity in the Marketing Literature

In the marketing literature, authenticity has been linked to branding (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry 2003; Kates 2004; Beverland 2005) and consumption behavior (Holt 1997; Belk and Costa 1998; Kozinets 2001, 2002). It has been used to legitimize and/or add value to products and services (Penaloza 2000; Holt 2002; Kates 2004, Beverland 2005), to categorize consumers (Grayson and Martinec 2004), and most recently to understand consumer motivation (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). In most of this marketing literature

(Grayson and Martinec 2004 is the exception), authenticity is presented and understood as a unified concept.

Other studies understand authenticity as consisting of several underlying constructs and types. For example, in a study about tourists visiting historic sites, Goulding (2000) articulated three types of consumers who visit historic sites: existential, aesthetic and social. Existential visitors appeared alienated from the present and were looking for an actual link to the past through observation and interaction with physical objects from an earlier time. Aesthetic visitors focused on craftsmanship and a feel for an idealized past with an understanding that the experience was primarily imaginary. Lastly, social visitors used the site as a backdrop for a presently oriented social experience.

Grayson and Martinec (2004) built on these themes and articulated the concepts of indexical (possessing a spatio-temporal linkage) and iconic (containing attributes of originality) types of authenticity (discussed below) but did not address the existential aspect. And while certainly taking steps in the direction of increased clarity, none of these authenticity constructs match the authenticity concept as articulated in the marketing literature mentioned above.

Prior to Goulding (2000) above, Wang (1999) articulated the construct of existential authenticity (among others) and divided it even further into two sub-constructs, inter- and intra-personal authenticity. These sub-constructs flirt with the authenticity concept outlined in the marketing literature cited above but given the tourism context, follow a very different trajectory. They focus on the experiences of the tourist – how they may participate in individual or social activities while in a different culture and thus feel they have had an

authentic experience. This concept of experience as a catalyst for the production of authenticity foreshadows the aesthetic authenticity construct developed in this paper.

Building on this construct of existential authenticity, I suggest that that aesthetic authenticity is a construct that has been a part of the marketing literature for at least a decade – but which until now has only been vaguely articulated. The previous literature acknowledges consumer demand for authenticity without precisely defining what it is. Existential authenticity as defined by Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006) is definitely an important construct, but it is created by and located in the mind of the consumer, through experience. Aesthetic Experience may be created through an existential experience (thus acknowledging the root meaning of “existential”), but is a construct which inheres in the product or service itself. It is an aspect of a product or service, and thus adheres to the elementary sense of the term “aesthetic” as noted in the Oxford English Dictionary (2011): how material objects are perceived by the senses in terms of how they conform to ideals about what is beautiful or pleasing. (A more precise definition of “aesthetic” is developed in chapter 2). This dissertation will address the development of the construct of aesthetic authenticity, posit a rationale for why consumers desire the construct, and show how the marketplace creates it and attaches it to products and services to meet this demand.

Problem to Be Investigated

The primary goal of this research is to develop a typology of authenticity which includes and informs both the previously studied constructs of indexical and iconic authenticity, and which investigates the posited existential and aesthetic constructs of the authenticity concept. The research questions include:

1. Do consumers recognize one or more additional aspects or constructs of authenticity other than the previously studied indexical and iconic authenticity?
2. Are these constructs relevant or apparent in the context of mass produced items in the marketplace? If these additional authenticity constructs are revealed, what similarities do the items share and what differentiates them from other items?
3. What rationales do consumers use to determine the authenticity of various groups of products?

Research Design

After a thorough review of the literature surrounding the authenticity concept in both the sociology and marketing fields, these research questions were refined and clarified. Careful consideration was given to identify the best philosophical approach to look at these questions, as well as the methods that would be most likely to provide results leading to further illumination of the topic. A critical theory approach was found to be a good match for the perspective of the extant literature. From a methodological perspective, an investigation was designed, using a grouping exercise, followed by open ended queries regarding the outcome of the exercise, which was then followed in 25% of the cases with a longer interview. This allowed a rudimentary quantitative analysis of the grouping exercise and a more rigorous qualitative analysis of the interviews. A detailed explanation of the design is found in chapter three

Following the grounded theory approach, interviews were transcribed and analyzed as they occurred. Initial analysis focused on data that related specifically to the research questions as outlined above. However given the nature of grounded theory, the insights and

understandings of the initial and subsequent subjects began to influence the course of the research. Some of this was anticipated in the research design, which as noted above anticipated that the interview process would acknowledge categories which began to emerge or coalesce into stable themes related to the theories and ideas suggested by the researcher and which were discussed with subjects later in the study.

Once the research was completed, the data proved to provide the researcher with a rich source of insights regarding the authenticity concept as understood by the subjects. Analysis of this data which follows will both provide illumination to and build upon the previous work in the area. In addition, it provides groundwork for additional future research on authenticity in the areas of marketing theory, scale development and other managerially relevant areas.

Significance/Need of the Study

As cited above, “Authenticity is one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing” (Brown et al. 2003). This is because consumers desire it. However it is a very broad concept and there is little agreement about what it means depending on both the context and the sense in which it is used. Building on Marx and following a critical theory perspective, this study investigates authenticity in the marketplace and attempts to provide greater clarity about the concept as well as posit a rationale for this consumer desire.

This research both illuminates past research on authenticity in the marketing field and attempts to fill a gap in the literature. It posits new applications of sociological theory to the study and practice of marketing. It also has application to both marketing practitioners as well as provides information that could spur additional academic research in areas of

marketing theory, consumer behavior, and scale development. Lastly, the topic is genuinely interesting and apropos to a wide range of disciplines.

In the next chapter I will outline previous research related to the larger concept of authenticity in the sociology and marketing literature. In this process I will show how the concept is currently understood as several different constructs, and how there appears to be a gap in this literature related to a construct I assert is aesthetic authenticity. Much of this literature comes close or touches on this construct, and I show where this occurs.

In the third chapter I outline the research design and data collection process which was used to find evidence of the previously understood constructs in the literature, as well as to identify the concurrent construct of aesthetic authenticity. In the fourth chapter I present the analysis of this data and show the findings which appear to support this hypothesized authenticity construct. Lastly, I conclude with a chapter which summarizes the study, shows the potential applications of this research, and outlines the implications it has for future research in the field.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines how the linkages between the marketing literature on authenticity and sociological theory. As will become evident, I outline some key aspects of authenticity as it is understood in the academic marketing literature. At key points in this journey, I apply sociological insights from scholars including Karl Marx, John Dewey, Theodor Adorno, and George Ritzer which shed new light on these aspects of the topic. In the process, new understandings regarding the function and role of authenticity in consumer behavior become apparent. At these junctures, gaps and/or insufficiently explained motivations or behaviors with regard to descriptions of authenticity suggest the existence of something which I call aesthetic authenticity. To begin, I will examine authenticity and individual experience from the perspective of the marketing literature and then will discuss how sociological concepts, particularly Dewey's work on consummative experience helps us to understand authenticity within the context of marketing.

Authenticity and Individual Experience

In most marketing literature (Grayson and Martinec 2004 is the exception), authenticity is presented and understood as an unproblematic and unified concept. Some scholars who study travel and tourism have attempted to deconstruct authenticity in terms of individual experience. Wang (1999) articulates authenticity as existential or arising out of personal experience. Wang further divides it into two sub-constructs, inter- and intra-personal authenticity. They focus on both the individual and social experiences of the tourist –

how they may participate in individual or social activities while in a different culture, the feeling that they have had an authentic experience. This concept of some type of exotic experience in a foreign culture serving as a catalyst for the production of authenticity and foreshadows the aesthetic authenticity construct developed in this paper.

Similarly, in a study on of tourists visiting historic sites, Goulding (2000) further defined three types of authenticity related to tourists who visit historic sites: existential, aesthetic and social. Though all three types of authenticity idealize the past, they achieve this idealization in different ways. Existential visitors are seen as alienated from the present and are looking for an experience of living in the past either through interaction with historical re-enactors or the material culture from a different time and place. Aesthetic visitors focused more on having a visual experience with the past through the appreciation of handmade objects and craftsmanship. Lastly, social visitors used the site as a backdrop as a social gathering or social experience.

In other marketing literature, authenticity is connected to material objects rather than emotional sensations or experiences. For example, Holt (1998) argues when a consumer declares that artisan goods are deemed authentic it is because they are not mass produced. Kates (2004) argues that authenticity for consumers in the fashion industry is signified by certain brands or designer names such as Chanel or Louis Vuitton. Another type of legitimacy is related to canonic products. These types of products are those that are approved by some type of authority which carry an official declaration of their authenticity such as Star Trek themed merchandise (Kozinets 2001).

Toward a More Abstract Typology of Authenticity

Grayson and Martinec (2004) formulated a more abstract typology of authenticity by building on the research done on the authenticity of material objects. They present authenticity as possessing indexical and iconic properties. Iconic authenticity is related to the spatial and temporal linkages evoked by material objects, while iconic properties are related to containing attributes of originality. Neither of these types of authenticity addresses an existential aspect. Furthermore, the existential aspect as outlined previously by Goulding (2000) (i.e.: an actual link to the past) is more similar to what Grayson and Martinec characterize as indexical authenticity, rather than the properties of existential authenticity as suggested by Wang (1999). Legitimacy and canonicity issues brought up by Holt (1998), Kozinets (2001) and Kates (2004) do not conform to these previously articulated constructs of authenticity. And while certainly taking steps in the direction of increasing the discipline's clarity about the subject of authenticity, they do not fit into Grayson and Martinec's indexical/ iconic framework as articulated in the marketing literature mentioned above. I will return to these issues later in the argument.

Once again, Grayson and Martinec's (2004) study of heritage sites articulated authenticity as having two distinct properties: Indexical and Iconic. They link authenticity to something that is created either through re-enactments of historic events or by manufacturing replicas of historical objects. Indexical authenticity is found in items that are not a copy or imitation but which have an actual spatio-temporal linkage to a historical time or person, such as George Washington's sword or hairbrush. This type of authenticity revolves around the historicity of the item's association with an important historical person, and was first mentioned in the tourism field in relation to museums. In this context, "museum-linked usage" determines whether objects are "worth the

admiration they are being given.” Therefore, authenticity is more related to the legitimacy of the object’s historical value based on its association with someone like George Washington, than what the object itself evokes independent of its provenance.

On the other hand, iconic authenticity is found in something that is made to seem authentic by virtue of its having a fixed, conventional style, as seen in the somewhat paradoxical phrase “authentic reproduction.” An example of this would be a hairbrush that was made using the same process and same materials as one which was used by George Washington two hundred years ago.

The indexical/iconic dichotomy is best articulated by Jones, Anand, and Alvarez (2005) who suggest that in cultural industries authenticity can be articulated using two different criteria. The first approach perpetuates tradition, such as when a symphony plays a canonical work, such as Beethoven’s 5th Symphony using early 18th century instruments. This would correlate to the iconic “authentic reproduction” as mentioned above. The second approach is to be original within an existing canon by offering a distinct style such as when Hank Williams reshaped the sound of country music in the mid-1950’s.

To Jones, Anand and Alvarez, authenticity can exist within an existing tradition or discipline but can be conceptualized differently from merely an indexical sense of the term. I argue that it is much closer to the intangible type of existential authenticity as discussed by Wang (1999). Though their approach is described more abstractly, in that they are talking about how the process by which something is created infuses it with authenticity. They do not label this as a distinct type of authenticity, but it is clear that this treatment comes very close to the construct of authenticity mentioned in the

marketing literature. However there is one critical distinction. In the marketing literature, the focus is on how the authenticity inherent in a product, service or performance affects the consumer, whereas in the tourism literature, the focus is on the consumer (the tourist) who creates and/or experiences something authentic. This leaves an important question unanswered about the aesthetic properties of authenticity that this dissertation attempts to answer.

In another study, Holt (2002) comes close to exploring the aesthetic properties of authenticity by examining the role of products, services, or performances which display some aspect of disinterest, lack of inherent economic agenda, or motivation for personal gain. This is similar to the idea of authenticity found in a study on the music industry where authenticity is focused on an aesthetic or imaginary experience that “is continually negotiated in an ongoing interplay between performers, diverse commercial interests, fans, and the evolving image” (Peterson 1997). Illustrative of this is Hughes’ definition – “It is not simply an imitation, but is a sincere, real, true and original expression of its creator, and is a believable or credible representation or example of what it appears to be” (Hughes 2000). For example, experts can compare contemporary performances with specific music styles of the past and similarly judge whether these performances are authentic or not. But more often than not, fans of the music (i.e., consumers) pay no attention to the experts. As Peterson states “...authentication in the field of country music [is] not made by experts but by the end consumers of the music, the fans” (Peterson 2005). Acknowledgement of this impact of market forces on the music industry makes the study of authenticity especially relevant in a marketing context.

In 2006, Leigh, Peters and Shelton provided another nuance when they introduced yet another conceptualization authenticity to the marketing literature in their study of the MG automobile subculture (Leigh et al. 2006). In this treatment of authenticity, the authors divide authenticity into three constructs – staged, constructive, and existential. The authors acknowledge that staged authenticity mirrors Grayson and Martinec’s (2004) indexical authenticity, and that constructive authenticity is a close analogue to the aforementioned iconic type. But the third type, existential authenticity, is more interactional. As it is defined by Grayson and Martinec, it is “activity based” and focuses on the experiences that the participants enjoy – it “coincides with postmodern consumers’ quest for pleasure and fun.” They acknowledge a debt to Wang (1999) in their development of this construct.

In all of these cases (Holt (2002), Peterson (1997, 2005) Hughes (2000), and Leigh, et al. (2006)) authenticity circles ever closer to the existential definition as suggested by Wang (1999), but instead of focusing on the experience of the consumer, the ultimate focus is how a product (and/or perhaps service in the case of music) becomes authentic. This is also seen in the legitimacy and canonicity issues brought up by Holt (1998), Kozinets (2001) and Kates (2004) mentioned above. Once this determination is made, then it can facilitate experience and/or transfer some aspect of this to the consumer. In Holt (2002), consumers value as authentic products which lack commercial motivation – as we will see later, this is because consumers know that they are judged by the products they consume and thus this ethos transfers to their self-concept as well as their understanding about how others view them. In Peterson (1997, 2005), the consumers decide what is authentic, what is “a believable or credible representation”

(Hughes 2000) of the artist's creative vision. Again, while it is the consumers who make this decision, the focus is on the authenticity of the music itself. And as Leigh (2006) suggests, the staged, constructive, and existential authenticity which they document in the MG subculture does not acknowledge what it is about the cars that makes them so special. The ultimate focus of all the activity is on the cars themselves.

However once again, the construct as posited by Grayson and Martinec's (2004) misses the usage of the authenticity concept seen in this marketing literature. Their definition focuses on concrete aspects of the product or service, which provides users with an easily defined way to determine authenticity. "Was it actually used by the person?" "Was this made from the same materials and in the same manner as it was one hundred years ago?" The answers to questions like this give easy answers to whether a product is or isn't authentic. However existential authenticity and aesthetic authenticity are far more difficult to define and thus pose a more interesting problem. As we have seen these determinations are less clear, as they vary from person to person. How do products or services come to possess these types of authenticity? Most often it is the consumer who decides. This is a similar distinction that Ritzer (2005) makes in his study of consumption in contemporary society. As a sociologist, I am more interested in consumer behavior and the social properties of how products or services become imbued with these different types of authenticity.

Authenticity and Interaction

Therefore building on the construct of existential authenticity, I suggest that that aesthetic authenticity is a construct that has been a part of the marketing literature for at least a decade – but which until now has only been vaguely articulated. As I will discuss

here, aesthetic authenticity is a social construct that is imbued by objects or brands which (1) incorporate a carefully controlled image; (2) use symbolic imagery in their advertisements and other efforts to control brand image; (3) have a close connection to consumer self-identity; and, (4) evoke a consummatory experience.

The previous literature acknowledges that consumers demand authenticity without having to precisely define it. Existential authenticity as defined by Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006) is definitely an important construct, but it is created by and located in the mind of the consumer, through experience. Aesthetic Experience may be created through an existential experience (thus acknowledging the root meaning of “existential”), but is also a social process that is evoked by some type of association with a product or service. Therefore, it is that aspect of a product or service that is related to human behavior using principles of taste or style considered associated with pleasure (Dewey 1932). It is also related to the definition of applied aesthetics taken from the marketing literature discussed above, which emphasizes how the consumption of products is related to their cultural properties through branding, commercial representation, or the reputation of its producer. Therefore, this dissertation conceptualizes aesthetic authenticity drawing on Dewey’s work on aesthetic ethics as it relates to understanding human behavior along with the applied aesthetics of cultural objects found in the marketing literature., Using the principles of aesthetics or the appreciation of that which is pleasurable enables me to posit a rationale for why consumers desire certain products over others due to their ability to evoke a specific type of pleasurable experience.

Aesthetic Authenticity

In this section, I will discuss the genealogy of the conceptualization of aesthetic authenticity in sociological literature, especially to how it relates to social interaction. This concern with authenticity arises out of the changing structure of society in the Industrial Age wherein people seemed to have lost themselves. Their agency has been stripped away and they are now merely objects to be controlled by outside forces. This loss of self or subjectivity, what Marx called estrangement or alienation, was due to changing nature of work in the 19th century. Marx argued that once work had become a commodity that could be exchanged for wages, it reduced a person's labor to an object or thing. Therefore, as labor became a commodity, human beings became separated from any ownership over their labor and themselves. This sense of loss, or alienation from the fruits of their labor, could only be conquered once people regained control of their labor and recaptured their authenticity. Finally, Marx predicted that the dehumanizing process of commodification and subsequent loss of human subjectivity could not be stopped until ones' property (labor) was restored under communism.

Marx's ideas about communism being the panacea for the loss of human subjectivity were later modified by a group of thinkers, now called the Critical Theorists, particularly Adorno and Horkheimer. This group of thinkers took Marx's ideas and modified them focusing more on human subjectivity than on the economic structure of society.

Insights from the Critical Theorists

Adorno (1973) drew from Heidegger's exposition of existential authenticity and notion of human subjectivity. An authentic person to Heidegger was "one who strived to make his life an integrated whole, who understood and responded to [his situation] by

bringing to bear upon it the lessons of tradition.” (Cooper, 1996). Here one can see that authenticity is stated in terms of being a characteristic of a person¹.

As mentioned above, critical theory draws heavily on the ideas of Marx. Marx argues that with the increasing specialization of labor, in capitalist society workers became increasingly alienated from the products which they produce. For Marx, factory work “...does away with the many sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity” (Marx [1867] 2003). “In the process of [capitalist] work...man is estranged from his own creative powers.” (Marx [1867] 1961).

In a similar vein, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) suggest that this same estrangement is found in the secularization of the sacred and the sacralization of the secular by consumers in the marketplace. Their interpretation of Marx’s argument is that alienation is akin to a worker’s “loss of reality” (Marx 1844).² In a similar vein, Belk and his colleagues argue that when artists enter the commercial marketplace, “they sow the seeds of their own destruction.” This is because the commoditization process removes some or all of the “sacred soul” from the work; the sacred nature of individualistic art

¹ Adorno argues that authenticity is akin to “objective consciousness compressed into self-experience [and thus ultimately] an idealized form devoid of content” (Adorno, 1976, xiii). His criticism is that Heidegger is preoccupied with the subject (human) and not the object, and that by including the subject in the definition, a tautology is created. Whether or not this is actually the case is not my concern. Once again, what is important in this research is that by drawing this distinction between existential authenticity which resides in the person and an aesthetic authenticity that resides in a product or service, a more exact understanding of the overall concept can be understood.

² “...Labor not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity ...this realization of labor appears as a loss of reality for the worker, objectification as loss of and bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as alienation.” (underlined in the original)

objects is diminished when it comes in contact with the commercial values inherent in the marketplace.³

What does this say about authenticity? The relationship between the blending of the sacred and the profane and existential and aesthetic authenticity is that that whenever an object is mass produced diminishes its authentic link to the artist; once the artwork is transformed into a mass produced commodity, the essence of its authenticity changes. The artist, the original creator of the object, becomes far removed from the process. This is similar to the process of alienation pointed out by Marx in that once human labor is consigned to the market, the measure of its value becomes external to the self.

Alienation, Rationalization and Disenchantment

Ritzer (2005) argues that the efficiencies required for corporations to survive in capitalist economy have forced a dehumanizing level of rationalization to the processes and systems within our society. The effects on workers in this system are to place them in a rationalized place designed to wrest the maximum amount of efficiency possible. Further, Ritzer argues that the consumer is now the object of the same processes of systematized rationalization that have shaped the nature of work. After Weber, he describes this as the “disenchantment” of everyday life. This affects everyone, regardless of their position in society because it undermines the institutions which hold it together. Ritzer pays special attention to the effects on family, “...where instead of preparing a meal at home and sitting around the dinner table and eating it, a family may obtain its evening meal from the drive-through window and eat it in the car.”

³ As part of this, they suggest that our understanding of this is seen in other venues as well. For example, they show that in Britain, the juxtaposition of advertising and religion is prohibited by a law passed in 1954. Another example is seen in the extreme sensitivity that advertisers generally show toward using Jesus or other overt religious figures in their marketing campaigns.

Paul du Gay (1996) argues that this process of rationalization has penetrated to the very language that we use to describe our roles in society. Quoting Bauman (1987), he notes “‘civic culture’ [is] gradually giving way to ‘consumer culture’ as citizens are reconceptualized as ‘enterprising consumers’”. McCracken (2005) suggests that “consumers are constantly canvassing the object world for goods with useful meanings.” The formation of social ties increasingly revolves around consumer activity, and thus consumption of goods and services becomes even more important because of how this activity functions to mark social differences. (Belk 1989) Because this is well understood, du Gay stresses that advertisers, marketers, etc. “don’t attempt to manipulate ‘consumers’ *per se*, but rather the *symbolic meanings* which are attached to the products”(1996). We know that consumers demand products and services which have additional meaning over and above their physical characteristics. I assert that in some cases, this additional meaning is aesthetic authenticity – the desire to recapture authenticity through the aesthetic experience of goods and services.

Rejecting Alienation

An understanding of the origins of alienation helps explain why the marketing literature suggests that authenticity as perceived by the consumer carries with it a disassociation with certain aspects of modernity, especially commercialization and profit motives (Beverland 2005). Kozinets (2002) takes this a step further in his exploration of the “Burning Man” festival, where the entire experience revolves around the anti-commercialization and anti-corporate ethos of the participants. In the marketplace, things that are unique are seen as authentic, they possess “decommodified authenticity” (Holt, 1998). This construct most closely resembles indexical authenticity as previously

explained. Thus marketers face an uphill battle with regard to assigning a different type of authenticity to commodified mass produced goods which are marketed as “brands”.

One technique is to attach or somehow take steps to gain legitimacy with a subculture or community and create authenticity in that manner (Kates 2004; Peterson 2005). In this case, a product or brand works with or allies itself with members of the targeted community through some action and becomes both “legitimate” and authentic in the process. An example is seen in Kate’s (2004) study of the gay community’s relations with the Levi Strauss Company, headquartered in San Francisco, CA. In 1992, Levi Strauss was the first Fortune 500 company to offer domestic partner health benefits to its employees. Given the importance of this issue to the gay community, he documented how this and other actions by the company legitimized and lent authenticity to their products. These actions served to lend the products a type of authenticity that immunized the brand from the anti-corporate attitudes and concern for profit motive mentioned above. What is key in this understanding is that the actions taken by the company (the experiences, the way of acting, etc.) are what assign this authenticity to the product. If the company were a person, it would be analogous to the previous example where a person acts in an existentially authentic fashion and imbues the things that he or she creates with aesthetic authenticity. Once again, I posit that the general concept of authenticity discussed in this literature can be broken down into at least two constructs – one of which is aesthetic authenticity.

Summary and Conclusions

My assertion is that consumer desire for aesthetic authenticity specifically and authenticity in general stems from consumer perception of this alienation of labor.

Workers rarely create things which are the outcome of their productive capacity, and as consumers they rarely purchase anything which is a direct expression of the labor and creativity of another person. This is the very definition of alienation as suggested by Marx. The consequences that Marx predicted did not come to fruition, and nearly a century later the critical theorists tried to understand why this was the case when it was clear that the fundamental position of the working class in society had not changed. As early as 1925, the journalist and philosopher Samuel Strauss coined the term “consumptionism” in his analysis of the business practices of early 20th century United States (Ritzer 2005).

Could the ever increasing consumption of goods and services be what countered the alienation that was also produced? Ritzer claims that this steady increase has led to a state of hyperconsumption in contemporary society. More importantly, however, is Ritzer’s focus on disenchantment. When consumers become disenchanted, they will search the marketplace for ways to reenchant their lives. When they are alienated, they will search the market for ways to relieve that alienation. Thus Ritzer acknowledges the fundamental operation of the market system when he states: “It is the consumers who demand reenchanting cathedrals of consumption, and those demands must be met if their business is to be retained” (Ritzer 2005). I suggest that the relatively recent (within the last 15-20 years) advent of “authenticity” as a concern in the marketing literature is a direct result of consumer demand for general needs and wants being largely fulfilled. Thanks to consumer culture, most everybody has everything he or she really needs. For the typical consumer, shopping is about finding the *right kind* of clothing, or food, or

whatever it is they desire. I suggest that aesthetic authenticity is what currently fills this gap.

The process that Ritzer suggests and that I am building upon is seen in the marketing literature. An overwhelming percentage of marketing messages tell people that they can achieve happiness by participating in the consumption of goods and services. This materialistic myth is imprinted upon us at an early age (Mayer & Belk 1982) and lasts a lifetime (Belk 1985). What is especially distressing are findings that correlate high levels of materialism with increased levels of stress and decreased feelings of well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Thus what actually occurs when people buy into this myth is that their happiness decreases. This creates a negative feedback loop which only serves to increase their desire for more goods and services. Since they already own most of what they need, they search for products and services to address what Ritzer termed their disenchantment, what Marx termed their alienation. I assert that once their basic needs are met, consumers want authenticity.

However what consumers generally get is an image or simulacrum of authenticity (Baudrillard 1981), a manufactured story which imbues the product with an aesthetic authenticity. This is different from either indexical or iconic authenticity because there is no original which would contain indexical authenticity, and thus there is nothing to copy in order to gain iconic authenticity. They get an authentic “Brand Name” product. Marketers attempt to inculcate this creative, authentic aura in the product and place it outside the sphere of the undesirable mass market in the consumer’s impression. Consumers want and demand authenticity in their products and services, but this is perhaps the one thing that the modern capitalist system almost by definition cannot

provide, at least in the sense of the types of authenticity that have been previously suggested above.

This somewhat contradictory aspect is clearly understood by researchers in this area. In his criticism of the source attractiveness model, McCracken (2005) shows that consumers will like a certain performer, but the model “cannot tell us why, nor can it contend with the meanings contained in [his] persona” (p.101). Dewey addresses this issue in *Philosophy and Civilization* (1931) when he suggests that discourse regarding a consummatory event or object is “felt, rather than thought” (p.99) and that “it speaks so completely for itself that words are poor substitutes” (p.101). Taking it even one step further, a contemporary philosopher suggests “that what Dewey calls the consummatory experience is essentially mystical” (Tan, 2008) or the term that Dewey occasionally uses, “ethereal.” However this does not suggest that consummatory experience is thus located somewhere beyond our ability to investigate it. On the contrary, Tan suggests a direct linkage to the much cited concept of “flow”, as suggested by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

Only aesthetic authenticity has the characteristics that make it compatible with the culture of mass consumption. What this illustrates is that as we have seen previously, definitions of authenticity generally reveal an inherent tension, a contradiction or paradox at the intersection of authenticity and the marketplace. Aesthetic authenticity can resolve this tension because it bridges the gap between the previously understood contradictions between authenticity and the mass market.

Aesthetic authenticity and consumption

What remains is to show how aesthetic authenticity is attached to or becomes a feature of a product or service. I suggest that the best way to understand this connection is to look to the American Pragmatist scholar John Dewey. In *Art as Experience* (1934), John Dewey described a particular type of experience distinguished by a pervasive quality which reached the stage of fulfillment or consummation. Echoing Marx, Dewey suggested that art (creations which express or embody meanings about one's self) and life had become separated in modern society. Prior to the industrial age, every product or service carried with it some sense of individual expression, perhaps the "sacred soul" of the maker. They all reflected some aspect of the creative self and could be considered art, at least in a larger sense.

Though Dewey wrote about consummatory experience primarily in relationship to art, he argued that due to art's unique quality (Dewey makes it clear that the work of art is not synonymous with the art product) it more often than other objects was able to evoke an immediacy that was both dynamic and reflective (Mathur 1966: 227). It has the power to clarify and concentrate meanings that are "contained in scattered and weakened ways in the material of other experiences" (Dennis and Powers 1960). When a person is making full use of his or her talents, capabilities, and potentialities, the experience is both immediate and self-actualizing, thus occurring at the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. The activity is self-validating and carries intrinsic value. As one scholar states: "The value of consummatory experience, in this sense, is in its ability to create an understanding between the artist and the spectator that the aesthetic can be shared between the artist and the audience" (Van Delinder 2000). The art (or in a marketing sense, products or services) which is(are) created in this process shares in this

consummatory experience. Maslow suggests “all [people] have the goal of self-actualization” (Dennis and Powers 1960) and equates this goal with the cognitive search for meaning in their lives.

I suggest that consumers participate in consummate experiences through a process of meaning transfer as suggested by McCracken (1986, 1988). He first states that advertising seeks to unite products and services with a “representation of the culturally constituted world” (1986). The advertising creation process strives to create an “equivalence” in the viewer’s mind between the created representation of the world and the product being advertised. What this does is eventually cause the viewer to understand the world through these essentially false or artificial representations of the culture. Secondly, what then occurs is that these products then serve to advertise the cultural meanings and understandings of the consumers themselves. Goods and services become cultural markers, and assume an additional level of importance as they are increasingly weighted with symbolic meanings. This is echoed by Venkatesh (2006) when he states “products are constructed and re-constituted through use and infused with symbols that are linked to the meanings in the production and consumption processes”. Therefore when an individual in a consumer society strives to achieve self-actualization, they search for goods and services which will help them express this sense of self.

I suggest that aesthetic authenticity, which is linked to Dewey’s consummatory experience, is something which consumers desire because of this desire for immediacy and self-actualization. Consummatory experience as outlined by Dewey is ultimately about a pleasurable experience and self-fulfillment. As Dewey states in *Experience and Nature* (1925), “...a consummation carries with it the continuation...of preparatory or

anticipatory activities” and “...the meaning of a thing is the sense it makes” (p.138 (I) and p.55 (II)). In other words, objects (good and services) which acquire aesthetic authenticity through the process which McCracken outlines transfer this aspect of consummatory experience to the owners of these objects. The reason or process is related to the aesthetics of how art is understood in culture. In *Philosophy and Civilization* (1931) Dewey offers a somewhat *gestalt* view of this by suggesting that in art, “the quality of the whole pervades – it permeates the whole” (p.96). It is easy to see through this understanding that the cultural qualities associated with the goods and services are transferred to the consumer. Thus, consumers’ underlying desire for self-actualization is another spur for their desire for aesthetic authenticity.

It is important to repeat the point that this conception of consummatory experience was understood by Dewey in a larger context and was not limited to art per se. Zeltner (1975) points out that the word “consummatory” is akin to the word “aesthetic” and is not necessarily associated with the fine arts. He goes on to suggest that Dewey’s reason for writing “Art as Experience” was to “restore the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living...when any ordinary activity is undertaken for its own fulfillment, it then becomes an intentionally cultivated experience and can rightly be called an aesthetic experience.” This understanding is echoed by another Dewey scholar who states: “Experience is an involved, meaningful, and shared response to the world and each other” and later “Art and Experience is book about life, not about fine art.” (Alexander 1987). In the marketing literature, Venkatesh and Meamber (2008) echo this sentiment when they suggest “Dewey laments that art objects of the “high” or “fine” art tradition have become so venerated that they are virtually detached from the

conditions in which art develops and thus have become remote from our daily lives [and he] exhorts us to return to the basic concept of experience of art and to the sorts of aesthetic experience that make up our everyday lives.”

I suggest that aesthetic authenticity is a construct of authenticity that is approached and discussed in marketing contexts differently than other authenticity constructs such as iconic, indexical, existential, etc. It is created or manifested in the market through association with consummate experience. Products are designed by or used by or advertised by those who can imbue them with this aesthetic authenticity. These people are the best snowboarders, the four-star chefs, the fashion-forward designers and the rock stars. The best of these, the ones who define what it means to be what they are we call consummate. An example is Michael Jordan, whose page on the NBA website proclaims him “the greatest basketball player of all time” (nba.com/history). Michael Jordan was the consummate basketball player. Not surprisingly, in my previous research (Mason, 2007) respondents overwhelmingly chose him as the “most authentic” celebrity (with Oprah, the consummate talk show host coming a distant second). 10 years after his retirement from the NBA, he was recently ranked the 20th most powerful celebrity in the world with \$55 million earned in 2010 (Forbes, Sep. 2010).

Aesthetic authentic consumption experiences occur when consumers feel some aesthetic is shared between themselves and a creator. A connection occurs between the artist and the spectator – it is authentic because the consumer understands the aesthetic, shares in it, values it. However, as the product or service is commercialized there is a risk that this aesthetic will be diluted, and eventually disappear. As Belk (1988) suggests, we

want to have things and experiences that are authentic because we know to a large part that this is how we are defined, both by others and by ourselves. Thus, the authenticity we seek in these particular products is inherent in the products themselves but reflects on us. We know they are mass produced by companies, however we also know that these companies are very concerned about their image. Furthermore, these products have been carefully advertised and promoted using symbolic meanings which acknowledge the role the product plays in self-identity and our desire for an association with consummate experience.

In the next chapter, I will outline the research design which was used for data collection and investigate this phenomenon as outlined above. Afterwards in chapter four I will show how the data was analyzed and present the findings regarding how this concept of aesthetic authenticity was understood by consumers and how it appears to manifest itself in the marketplace.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

As discussed in Chapter Two, an overarching goal of this research was to develop an authenticity typology. This typology is intended to address the existing strengths of indexical and iconic constructs of authenticity, while more clearly developing and delineating existential and aesthetic constructs of the authenticity concept. In this chapter I will discuss the process that was used to determine the best methodological approach to this question, and outline the consequent research method that was chosen, as well as how it was implemented to collect the data. To study the authenticity concept and find evidence of the aesthetic authenticity construct, it was important to carefully consider the methodological options that were available. There is a long tradition of qualitative research in the sociological literature. Therefore some thought was given of utilizing a symbolic interactionist approach as seen in the “Iowa school” because of how this paradigm would fit with the authenticity concept as operationalized in the research subject.

However to clearly explain the rationale for the methodological approach that was chosen, it is important to lay out the research questions designed to address the following issues:

1. Do consumers recognize one or more additional aspects or constructs of authenticity other than the previously studied indexical and iconic authenticity?
2. Are these constructs relevant or apparent in the context of mass produced items in the marketplace? If these additional authenticity constructs are revealed, what similarities do the items share and what differentiates them from other items?
3. What rationales do consumers use to determine the authenticity of various groups of products?

In the process of designing the research proposal, there were two issues about this approach that became a concern. The first was the difficulty in finding appropriate scales that could be used and/or modified in order to best measure the current knowledge base related to authenticity in the sociological literature. There are articles related to the authenticity concept which apply many different scales, (e.g. Sheldon, Ryan, et.al 1997,) but these articles relate to issues of personal authenticity, how people feel about their own sense of self. Of course since one tenet of my research is that people understand the impact of the things they own on their self-concept as well as on others, this approach which focused on the individual was not immediately out of the question. In addition, the fact that I was hoping to focus on the larger issue as it related to society in general would also be well served in a symbolic interactionist approach as seen in Erickson (1995). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, this research ultimately focuses on

people's opinions and attitudes about the authenticity of the products in their lives and so this avenue of approach appeared less than ideal.

The second issue was more related to a more strictly methodological concern and less so with regard to theory. I feared that utilizing a quantitative method in an attempt to discover and/or confirm the existence of the hypothesized construct might introduce too much bias into the study. This mirrors the critique by Guba and Lincoln (2004), especially as it relates to the etic/emic dilemma (researcher bringing his or her views into the views of the subjects) and the exclusion of the “discovery dimension” in the research. In other words, the researcher creates an a priori hypothesis and imposes it on the discovery process. Given the nature of attempting to locate a particular construct in a field where there is an absence of prior scales (previously noted), creating a new scale for this construct would be premature. This being the case, it seemed wisest to use a method which would allow for the subjects to create their own constructs of the authenticity concept. Once this was completed, I could compare these new constructs with the other previously identified constructs in the literature. Hopefully these new constructs would match the previous constructs and thus ensure the “validity” of the method. At that point differences (constructs which did not match previous constructs) could be more closely analyzed for evidence of aesthetic authenticity, the newly hypothesized construct.

In order to explore consumer motivations in the marketplace, I conducted this research using a critical theory lens (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005) which assumes that the researcher will “use his or her work as a form of social or cultural criticism” and has evolved to focus on issues of power, ideology, facticity, language, privilege, and class (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). I came to this perspective during the literature review, where

I discovered that early critical theorists like Horkheimer and Adorno (from the Frankfurt School) addressed issues of authenticity in their commentary on Marxist alienation (see chapter two for details). Thus this critical theory perspective appeared to be a good fit, and current literature in the critical theory perspective led me to scholars such as Kincheloe (ibid) who used the concept of *bricolage* in their research. This meant using whatever method would best assist in answering the research questions. In addition, this research perspective is supported by a recent article in the *Journal of Marketing Management* which suggests critical theory as an appropriate avenue for marketing research (Saren, 2009). Thus, this study was designed to continue in a critical theory direction –ultimately to serve as social and cultural criticism. As a result it focuses on the language that consumers use to describe the characteristics of products in the marketplace.

As evident from the discussion in the literature review addressed above, this research posits that aesthetic authenticity is something which is imbued in products and services as an enticement to encourage consumers to purchase them. Furthermore, such encouragement works because consumers need to fill a gap where something is missing in their lives – the gap that is caused by alienation. This research is clearly social criticism in a somewhat pejorative sense of the term, and it is important that this potential for bias be addressed to ensure its legitimacy. Given the relationship that consumers have with the products and services in their lives previously documented in this research – how they use them to define their self-concept and their perception by other people –the researcher has been very careful to maintain a strictly neutral approach during subject interviews regarding these items. However the researcher acknowledges the impossibility

of maintaining perfect neutrality, similar to the way that Borland (2004) acknowledges this difficulty in her ethnographic research. Her solution is to attempt to re-interview subjects after transcribing, coding, and analysis and check if her understandings mirror those of the subject. Given the scope of this project, this solution is not feasible. Thus in the section where subject responses are used to bolster or illuminate a particular aspect of the findings, context will be provided to assist readers in their assessment of the validity and reliability of the subject statements.

Approach to the Study

This research design of this study employed an investigation where data was collected using human subjects being asked to sort pictures of consumer products, followed by interviews. The reason for using a qualitative approach was that through this somewhat unique method, subjects would be able to create constructs related to authenticity independently of any pre-conceived categories imposed on the subjects. Follow up interviews were then conducted on approximately 25% of the subjects after the grouping exercise using the categories they created. Of course, the process of selecting the stimuli did impose some limits on the subjects, but measures were taken to minimize these externalities on the design as well as potential bias in selecting the interviewees and are addressed below.

Subjects for the research are enrolled in undergraduate marketing courses in a business college at a regional Midwestern research university. Students were offered extra credit points to participate in the study in accordance with the rules of the university IRB board and the policies of the business school. As such, students who chose not to participate were offered other means to gain extra credit to minimize self-selection issues.

97 subjects agreed to participate in the sorting task. Of this pool of 97 subjects, 25 were randomly chosen and immediately asked to participate in a follow-up interview following the sorting task. All 25 subjects who were asked agreed to participate. The 97 participants were recruited from upper division courses in Consumer Behavior, Promotional Strategies, Services Marketing, and Marketing Strategy; thus the majority of subjects were juniors and seniors majoring in business related courses. Because of prerequisites, nearly every subject had at least one course in marketing, with most having two or more, and a majority either majoring or minoring in the subject. Ages range from 20 to 29 with a median age of 21 and a mean age of 21.6. The subjects were 51 percent male and 49 percent female, with 96 percent originally from the United States. Respondents were 82 percent Caucasian and 18 percent non-Caucasian. Importantly, the subset of subjects interviewed did not differ significantly from these total figures.

Materials.

Items that were grouped during the sorting task consisted of pictures or drawings each glued to a 4x6 index card, with a short (less than one sentence) description printed underneath. These were chosen from stimuli used in previous studies such as (Grayson and Martinec 2004), (Anand and Beverland 2005), (Mason, 2007), (Beverland and Farrelly 2010), and additional stimuli suggested by unpublished research by the researcher. This is in line with the description in Charmaz (2005) of constructivist grounded theory where the researcher's location in and influence on the world is acknowledged. Thus some of the stimuli were chosen specifically to gauge the potential relationships between these objects, the subjects, and the extant and hypothesized constructs. Ultimately, the researcher hoped that relatively stable categories would begin

to emerge, and thus key insights about the types of authenticity revealed in these categories could be investigated and brought forward during the subsequent interview.

Procedures for Collecting Data: Evidence to be Obtained

(a) objectivity.

In order to explore consumer motivations in the marketplace, I conducted this research from a critical theory perspective (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005) as outlined above. Their contemporary understanding of this perspective assumes that the researcher is attempting to “use his or her work as a form of social or cultural criticism” and it has evolved to focus on issues of power, ideology, facticity, language, privilege, and class. This was operationalized in the study through the focus on an analysis of the language that was used in the descriptions, as well as the way that the interviews were analyzed. As outlined in more detail in chapter four, this analysis collated the semi-structured interview responses into separate documents relating to a wide range of topics and themes. This allowed me to study all the responses related to a particular stimulus or topic somewhat independently of my memory and notes regarding each interview. At least with regard to these narrower analyses, this helped to eliminate or lessen any potential bias related to the particular subjects.

(b) reliability and validity.

In regard to reliability and validity, the research methods used adhered to widely accepted forms of qualitative research methods as outlined in (Thomas 2003), (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), and (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006). These texts suggest that terms like “validity” and “reliability” have specific meanings in the quantitative research

paradigm and do not accurately reflect the epistemological worldview espoused in many qualitative paradigms. A metaphor illustrating validity and reliability in a quantitative sense refers to the location and pattern of a shotgun blast on a target. A valid study that is lacking reliability would have a very widely spaced pattern of holes all over the target that perhaps appear to center on the bulls-eye. A reliable study that is lacking in validity would have a very dense pattern of holes that is nowhere near the bulls-eye. Lastly, a study with both will have the dense pattern centered on the target. In a quantitative study statistical methods can be used to gauge these measures, however in a qualitative study, such measures are not available. However in both research paradigms there is ample literature to suggest methodological steps to ensure the ultimate goal of having a reasonable level of confidence in the findings. Thus given the nature of the research questions and the resources available, this research has been designed to ensure a level of “goodness” (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006).

(c) treatment and presentation of data

During initial interviews, subjects were were instructed to give their opinions and not to think about the images of terms of “correct” or “incorrect” answers. I addressed researcher bias both by assuming a bystander status toward the subjects (attempting not to reveal any personal preference or motive for their responses) as well as by carefully outlining potential conflicts or concerns in the analysis. Thus I allow the reader to judge the existence and/or level of bias. In addition, an interview guide was created to address potential concerns or problems that subjects might encounter during the grouping exercise and the subsequent interview. Thus, it was assumed beforehand that subjects might have difficulty in completing the task of sorting objects according their

authenticity, so to maintain the “goodness” (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006) of the research as outlined earlier, it was important that the researcher not assist. In the case that subjects asked multiple questions or attempted to give up during the grouping process, researcher answers/statements were also created. However in actuality, very few of the research subjects had difficulty completing the task. Less than 10% (approximate) asked the researcher to define “authenticity” and all of these subjects appeared to accept the response that it was “up to them to decide.” After the sorting process was finished, subjects who were not going to be interviewed were thanked and allowed to go. For the subjects chosen for the interviews, additional consent was requested (and granted in all cases), a recording device was activated, and an interview continued using a semi-structured process and in-depth techniques. Initially subjects were asked to give titles to the categories they created, and then the researcher asked follow-up questions relating to these titles and categories as the interview continued. Probing techniques were used to investigate the rationales and processes that the subjects used to identify authenticity in the marketplace, as well as its linkage to brand associations and potential relationship to their social identities. Please see Appendix A for an example of the script, the prompts, and the follow-up questions used in the interviews.

Methodologically, I followed a grounded theory approach suggested by Charmaz (2005). Building on the method as first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) the research began with a sorting exercise outlined above where subjects were asked to categorize a set of “authentic” products and services with no researcher input about what or how many categories are present. This allowed the subjects to determine for themselves how many categories to create. Furthermore, 12 items were chosen as stimuli

because this number is easily factored into 2, 3, 4, or 6 even numbered groups. Thus any subtle clue that subjects might have attempted to discern about the researcher's "desired" number of groups was mitigated to a great degree, despite subjects being told they could create as many groups as they wish.

After this sorting exercise, a subset of subjects was asked if they would agree to be interviewed regarding the decisions they had made and about authenticity in general. Researcher bias as well as self-selection bias was avoided through the use of a "window" system for scheduling the sorting exercise and the subsequent interviews. Respondents to the request for research subjects were asked to one of several 1 ½ hour "windows" during the data collection when they could participate (e.g.: 10:00 am – 11:30 am). Once a window had four participants, a random number generator (www.random.org) was used to determine which subject would be interviewed. The other three subjects were assigned times at 15 minute intervals, leaving approximately 45 minutes for the last subject. (e.g.: #1 – 10:00, #2 – 10:15, #3 – 10:30, #4 – 10:45) and notified via e-mail. In all cases prior to beginning the sorting exercise, subjects were briefed regarding IRB protocols and told there was a possibility that they might be interviewed afterwards. However, only the last person in the "window" was actually asked to participate in an interview. This also ensured that the sorting process would not be affected by the subjects knowing beforehand whether they were or were not going to be interviewed.

This method also incorporates the concept of *bricolage* as suggested in Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) as mentioned above. This means using whatever methodological strategies are necessary in the process of conducting the research. An example of this is seen in how the stimuli were changed and reassigned by the subjects during the sorting

process and subsequent interviews. The researcher's initial assumptions regarding the stimuli (chosen to elicit commentary on particular hypothesized constructs) did not survive the investigation. This is demonstrated and commented upon in several places during the analysis.

In addition, in order to learn the ways that subjects understood the relatively abstract concept of authenticity, it was important to get the subjects to think deeply about the topic before the interview. Thus this research followed a suggestion in Thomas (2003) where a blending of what is nominally a qualitative exercise was combined with a semi-structured interview. What the exercise does is prime the subject regarding the concept that will be discussed. It also provided a set of stimuli that could be referred to during the interview process. Many times during the interviews, subjects would bring up comparisons that they had made with other items to help clarify their responses.

The details of the questions asked in the semi-structured interview process were outlined above. However, what the semi-structured interview method also does is provide the researcher with a similar set of open-ended questions to ask the interview subjects. During qualitative analysis and coding of the interviews, the researcher went through the transcripts and selected all the passages from each subject relating to particular topics discussed during most of the interviews. For example, most of the subjects were asked to discuss their experiences when eating in a Mexican restaurant which is advertised as being "authentic." Nearly every subject asked could recall eating in such an establishment and was asked to discuss what "authenticity" meant in that context, and whether they felt comfortable assessing the "authenticity" of their experience. Thus the researcher was able to comb the transcripts and select all the discussions related to this

topic and collect them in one document, containing all (in this case 23) responses. This coding process was performed with several different stimuli sets and interview topics, such as the Coke / Nike Shoes / Apple Computer grouping and another interview questions regarding a hypothetical situation designed to elicit commentary on the indexical/iconic distinction. This simplified the subsequent analysis and allowed additional insight regarding the topics to become more immediately evident, as will be seen later in chapter 4.

In addition, it is important to note that all procedures with regard to subject anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy as required by the IRB process were strictly adhered to during the study. Participant sign-up sheets were collected separately from the sheet used to record extra credit information, and this sheet had no correlation to subsequent subject number assignment or selection. Data concerning item groupings were collected on a data sheet using only a subject number (see appendix B). Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder (iPod), transferred to the researcher's university computer at the end of each day, and once transferred to the secure central university hard-drive, were deleted from the recording device. Interviews were subsequently transcribed into Microsoft word documents which were also stored on the secure central university hard-drive

The stimuli consisted of 12, 4x6 inch index cards with pictures of items pasted to them. Brief descriptions were printed underneath. An example can be seen in figure 1 (reproductions of all the stimuli are found in appendix C).



Figure 1. Sample card from grouping exercise

The stimuli were as follows:

- 1) 12th Century Medieval Coin
- 2) George Washington's Sword
- 3) Nike "Air-Jordan" Basketball Shoes
- 4) Hand-Tied Fly-Fishing Lure
- 5) New Buffalo-Skin Tipi
- 6) Bottle of Coca-Cola
- 7) Norwegian Fisherman's Sweater
- 8) Baseball Signed by Babe Ruth

- 9) Hank Williams Style of Country Music
- 10) Apple Macbook Computer
- 11) Tamales with Molé Sauce
- 12) Sherlock Holmes style Hat

These items were chosen for several reasons. The 12th Century Medieval Coin (#1) is an example of a generic, antique item. It is designed to evoke a sense of indexical authenticity that does not have a direct linkage to a specific person or place. In addition, it should appear relatively rare to a typical subject, so it is not something that could easily be purchased. Also, this item plays prominently in the interview question regarding the hypothetical situation at a modern-day Renaissance festival where someone could create a reproduction of one of these coins in an authentic way, thus evoking the issue of iconic authenticity in that context.

George Washington's sword (#2) is a *specific* antique item which has an actual temporal and physical connection to a historical figure. This is the definition of an indexically authentic item. Washington is an historic figure ubiquitous to the vast majority of people living in the United States. Grayson and Martinec (2004) used George Washington's comb as an example in their article – given the visual nature of the sorting task, the researcher felt the comb lacked a sense of *difference* from the present. Thus to accentuate the historical nature of the object, the anachronistic sword was chosen instead.

The Nike "Air-Jordan" shoes (#3) have a connection to a person who is nearly contemporary to the subjects, and also represents a product that most of them are familiar with. Michael Jordan and George Washington are very similar in their relative ubiquity.

However the shoes are a product that is heavily marketed, not an historical object in any sense. In a previous study (Mason 2007) a subject pool of students (similar to the pool for this study) chose Michael Jordan as the “most authentic” celebrity, and in pre-testing, members of a different subject pool with similar characteristics named Nike shoes as an “authentic brand”. Clearly this item would elicit some type of response.

Item (#4), the Hand-Tied fly-fishing lure was included to investigate the importance of the “hand-made” aesthetic. The pre-tests as well as the literature review (Holt 1998, Kozinets 2002) indicated that there was definitely some dynamic of hand-made products factoring into the authenticity debate. In addition, it also seems to be related somewhat to the undercurrent running through Marx’s argument regarding alienation. The particular object was chosen because fishing is a mainstream activity and generalizations about its adherents would likely not cloud the judgment of the subjects as they considered the object. In addition using “hand-tied” in the title hopefully made clear the important aspect of the object for reasons of classification.

The New Buffalo Skin Tipi (#5) was given as an example of an item where the “hand-made” aspect had to be assumed by the subject. This item was suggested in the literature (Belk and Costa 1998). In addition, it is an example of something which has iconic authenticity, in that it is made in an authentic fashion. This is expressed through the use of the identifier “new”. It is unclear whether this distinction was grasped by the subjects or whether it was overpowered by the accompanying cultural linkage to the American Indian experience in the United States, its salience in a state which is largely defined by this experience, and the ramifications it entails, which is discussed later in chapter 4.

The bottle of Coca-Cola (#6) was chosen for a similar reason as the “Air-Jordan” shoes, with one critical difference. Coca-Cola is not linked to a particular person, it is a famous product in itself that does not rely on that association. As is discussed later, the aesthetic authenticity hypothesized to exist in this product is not linked to the consummate experience of a person. In the interviews, comparisons were made between Coke and Pepsi to further examine this characteristic of the product. Similar to the “Air-Jordan” shoes, subjects in a previous study (Mason 2007) as well as in pre-tests identified Coca-Cola as an “authentic-brand” and thus this stimulus was included, using a picture of the trademarked contour “Coke bottle” shape.

Stimulus (#7), the Norwegian Fisherman’s Sweater was chosen because it exemplifies a type of clothing labeled as “authentic” that has been seen by the researcher in many retail and catalog clothing outlets. The actual type of authenticity presented in this object is unclear, it appears to be a more generic example of the term. Therefore, it was hoped that this could serve as a stimulus item which would encourage subjects to explore the general concept of authenticity in more detail. As outlined later in chapter 4, this stimulus item proved ineffective at producing much usable data.

The Babe Ruth Baseball (#8) was included as another indexically authentic item. However given that it has the signature, the baseball has a more tangible temporal relation to the historical person. Additionally, Babe Ruth is another ubiquitous sports personality similar to Michael Jordan, however the object itself is not something that can commonly be purchased. Also, there is a cultural significance to baseball as a uniquely American invention, adding that aspect to the aura of associations that a subject would consider as they attempted to classify it.

Hank Williams style of Country Music (#9) was included because academic literature in the music field identified it as being particularly authentic (Peterson 2005). This understanding of authenticity is somewhat unique to this academic genre and is well defined. It was hoped that subjects would connect this to other items and serve as a way to better define this construct. As will be discussed later, this proved to be a mistake.

The Apple Mac-Book computer (#10) was included as another consumer item that was identified in previous studies (Mason 2007) and pre-tests as an “authentic brand”. In addition, there is a subset of articles in the marketing literature surrounding this brand and how it markets itself (e.g. Schau and Muniz 2006, Simon 2011). Thus using this brand as an exemplar for a construct allows for a linkage to that literature stream, further cementing and clarifying its understanding.

Stimulus (#11), the Tamales with Molé Sauce were included for two reasons. The first was to explore the potential understandings related to the aforementioned example of an “authentic” Mexican restaurant. By using this item, the hypothetical situation could be presented to subjects more naturally, “creating a feeling of natural involvement for both participant [and interviewer]” (Miller and Crabtree 2004) during the course of the interview. It was also chosen because of the ubiquity of “authentic Mexican food” in American culture such that it could serve as an excellent data point in the study.

Lastly, stimulus (#12), the Sherlock Holmes style hat was included because it was used as a stimulus item in the previous literature (Grayson and Martinec 2004). Its status as an authentic object which is associated with a fictional character allows comparison to other objects in the study associated with actual personae, both living and dead. Ideally,

this inclusion would allow linkage to previous literature (mentioned above) as well as additional meaningful distinctions to emerge.

The list of items to be grouped was carefully screened in an attempt to ensure that no major commonalities existed which could serve as confounding factors that might cause spurious associations not connected to the authenticity of the objects. In many cases, items could be grouped in many different ways depending on what the subject chose to focus upon. Subjects were told to consider only the “aspect of authenticity” when grouping the items, but it was evident that many perhaps allowed other aspects of the items to intrude on this task. At the outset subjects were told they would have no more than five minutes to complete the task. However in no cases did any of the subjects take more than five minutes. In future investigations of this nature, subjects should be asked to take a minute or so to carefully consider the authenticity of the items *before* beginning the sorting task. Another option might be to ask subjects to sort the items into authentic and non-authentic categories, and then ask them to sort the authentic ones. These suggestions could help to lessen the interference of outside aspects and better focus the subjects to considerations of authenticity.

All 97 subjects completed the grouping exercise. After finishing the researcher noted which stimuli were grouped together, in addition to how many groups were created. At this point the researcher asked the subjects to “give a name to the type of authenticity” in each group. Many subjects found this part of the exercise difficult. This part of the exercise revealed that in many cases the subjects appeared to have grouped the stimuli according to extraneous factors unrelated to their authenticity. In other cases, subjects appeared to have grouped the stimuli according to different *levels* of authenticity

(e.g. less authentic, moderately authentic, very authentic, etc.) However in several of these cases the subsequent interviews revealed that this extraneous rationale or grading system was more related to their difficulty in articulating or identifying a specific name for the authenticity in those items. This will be shown and developed further in the section devoted to the interview data.

Another issue with regard to this part of the data is an additional factor of non-uniformity of responses. Of the subjects who appeared to focus on authenticity, approximately half of them used easy to comprehend sets of adjectives or adverbs to classify their sorting process. Examples of these would be terms like “historical,” “cultural,” “traditional,” “progressive,” “timeless,” etc. These did vary according to tense and specificity (e.g. historic – history – historical) but a general root word is usually identifiable and makes a very elementary analysis of these responses possible. However other responses appear to describe some of these terms but are subject to interpretation. “Unique” was a somewhat common response (as was “common”) however “one of a kind” was also used more than once. “Unique” does mean “one of a kind” but in any form of semantic analysis there is much room for debate. Should that next step be taken in the interest of aggregating responses in an attempt to better illustrate common concepts associated with a particular type of authenticity? In some cases the researcher has made this leap, in others not. This is based on his understanding of the topic and personal participation in the research process.

In addition there were responses such as “the *idea* is authentic,” “indistinguishable,” “relevant to me,” “related to a person,” and “inspired by a celebrity.” These responses are very difficult to reduce to a single descriptive word, and/or in some

cases, even understand what is meant. Once again, for those subjects who were subsequently interviewed, these statements were clarified and became better understood. For the purposes of elementary analysis such as creating a word cloud, however, once again readers will be asked to defer to the researcher's judgment. Obviously all of these issues are common when allowing subjects to give a free, open-ended response to a query.

There are many positive aspects of these methods for data collection and analysis. The limited sorting task will serve to introduce and familiarize the subject with the concept of authenticity in general as well as prime them to think about possible categories to discuss during the interview. These can also serve as prompts for the researcher as suggested above. The open-ended questions regarding the categories that the subjects create serve to allow the subjects to come up with ideas and concepts that perhaps have not been considered by the researcher, and stress the discovery process as well. Lastly the interviews will allow the researcher to delve more deeply into subject rationales and give glimpses to thought processes in action. Given the complex nature of the subject, it would be very difficult to attempt to capture this kind of abstract data through the use of a survey, or other more conventional quantitative data gathering method.

However these methods do add limitations at the outset. Any analysis of the grouping process is constrained and defined by the objects which are contained within it. In addition, the grouping exercise is presented to the subjects as an artificial decision which lacks any real-world context or analogue. Thus to the subject, the subsequent interview might seem to be based on a mystifying experience which they are now being called upon to elaborate upon. As the researcher, I did not get the feeling that this was

occurring during the data collection process. However anyone who has asked a parent about their children's talents knows that people's ability for self-assessment can be somewhat suspect. This being the case, I have made the attempt to include as much data as is reasonable so that readers can judge the veracity of my analysis independently to some degree.

To give one example, given the nature of the question regarding the naming of the categories it was important not to restrict or limit the ability of subjects to freely respond with whatever came to mind during the interview. As will become evident in the next chapter, I feel the wide variety of responses actually reinforces my thesis that aesthetic authenticity is something that exists in the marketplace but which is sometimes difficult to locate or define. In this next chapter I will analyze the data which supports the existence of the previously identified indexical, iconic, and existential authenticity. Most importantly, I will show that the aesthetic authenticity that I describe is also clearly evident. The reason it is sometimes difficult to locate or define is because it exists at or near the margins of these other types of authenticity. Through this analysis, a clearer understanding of where to locate this aspect of authenticity and the important role it plays in consumer behavior will emerge.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

In this chapter I analyze the data that was collected and present the findings which emerged from the analysis. This process combined an elementary matrix analysis of pair groupings to show stimulus items that tended to be placed together by the subjects, a semantic word-cloud analysis utilizing the terms that subjects used to describe these groups, and an in-depth analysis of semi-structured subject interviews using the stimulus groupings which they created as well as additional input from the researcher. These analyses are presented in the order in which they were conducted, so that initial information collected and analyzed could be used to assist in the subsequent stages. I begin with the elementary matrix analysis.

Subject groupings were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Groups of items identified by the subjects were placed in a 12x12 co-occurrence matrix, so that the column (and row) for each item identify the other items grouped with it. (See figure 2)

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>
1 coin	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
2 sword	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
3 shoes	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
4 fly	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
5 tipi	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
6 coke	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
7 sweater	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
8 baseball	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
9 hank w.	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
10 computer	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
11 tamale	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
12 hat	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

Figure 2. Co-occurrence matrix for sample subject – 1's in each row and column indicate items in same group.

For example, this subject created four groups as follows:

1. Coin, sword, coke, baseball, and Hank Williams
2. Shoes, computer
3. Fly, tipi, tamale
4. Sweater, hat

Matrices like this were created for each subject and aggregated. At this point the collected matrices were analyzed by tabulating all the pair-wise relationships between the items. Through this tabulation, it is possible to see the percentage of respondents who placed individual items together in a group. These percentages were then arranged in a matrix, and all percentages greater than 30% were highlighted with the darkest highlights indicating the highest percentages. This is presented in figure 3.

	sword	shoes	fly	tipi	coke	sweater	b-ball	hank w	comp.	tamale	hat
1 Coin	75%	3%	23%	51%	12%	9%	51%	24%	5%	27%	6%
2 Sword		7%	21%	41%	11%	4%	63%	37%	5%	14%	10%
3 Shoes			12%	3%	47%	32%	19%	16%	65%	9%	33%
4 Fly				43%	13%	33%	21%	22%	25%	25%	25%
5 Tipi					14%	16%	27%	25%	8%	35%	9%
6 Coke						12%	22%	21%	55%	37%	10%
7 Sweater							4%	15%	20%	28%	69%
8 Baseball								41%	11%	11%	18%
9 Hank W.									15%	14%	26%
10 Computer										11%	15%
11 Tamale											16%

Figure 3. Percentage of all subjects who grouped items in same category – (darker boxes indicate higher percentages)

Before analyzing this matrix, it is important to recognize certain inconsistencies which were revealed in the data collection process. For example, the second highest percentage, the pairing of the “Sherlock Holmes style Hat” and the “Norwegian Fisherman’s Sweater” appears to be a case of extraneous factors unrelated to considerations of authenticity. This was borne out by information received when subjects were asked to name the groups they had created. In most cases, groups containing the sweater and the hat were classified in a more utilitarian fashion as “clothing”. This

contrasts with the other item of clothing, the “Nike Air-Jordan shoes” which were more often grouped with the “Apple computer” and “Coca-Cola.” These groups were generally classified by subjects using terms which were more indicative of the symbolic value of the items. This was also seen in the subsequent interviews, which will be discussed later in the paper. The other weaker comparisons regarding the sweater are somewhat suspect as well. Discussions with several subjects revealed this stimulus item to be unremarkable, with some not knowing what it was and/or not commenting on its inclusion in a group of items.

A similar issue was seen with the item “Hank Williams Style of Music”. This item was included in the stimuli because of the role it played in fostering the researcher’s understanding of the concept of aesthetic authenticity during the literature review and his role in the creation of the country music genre. However during the grouping process, this item was placed in a group by itself more than any other item, and during the naming procedure often subjects would suggest that they did that because they had no idea where to put it. This item was the only abstract concept included in the stimuli, and several subjects verbally responded that they misunderstood and thought they were supposed to classify Hank Williams himself, not his “style of music”. In addition discussions during the interviews revealed that including this in the stimuli was clearly a mistake likely due to generational differences between the researcher (one generation removed from Hank Williams Sr.) and the subjects (two or more generations removed) as well as subjects interchangeably discussing Hank Williams Jr. It would likely be more appropriate to include a contemporary music figure such as Lady Gaga or remove this type of stimulus altogether and design a separate study with regard to different types of authentic abstract

concepts. Thus, the data is included for the sake of transparency, however it is not useful for subsequent analysis.

The “Tamale with Mole Sauce” was another item which did not elicit a strong pairing related to authenticity factors, especially since it was often paired with “Coke” and described as “food.” However a closer analysis of the group names suggests that a significant percentage paired it with “Tipi”, used a more symbolic description such as “culture”, and in the interviews, this pairing did elicit authenticity related discussion, especially as it related to cultural authenticity and ethnicity. This finding will also be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

Word Cloud Analysis

One way to combine the analysis of the data presented in figure 2 with the data collected regarding how subjects named the groups is to use a word cloud (McNaught and Lam, 2010). Word clouds are a graphical representation of the number of times a word appears in a set of text. Words which are used more often are represented in larger text (usually common words such as “a” and “the” are not included). In the case of this naming data, the following word-clouds illustrate the terms subjects used to describe the groupings of items as suggested in figure 2. This demonstrates the existence of certain semantic patterns which help illustrate the key differences in the way subjects identify the groupings they created. For example, using the highlighted pairings in the first line of figure 3 creates a cloud using the terms associated with Coin, Sword, Tipi and Baseball:



Figure 4. Word Cloud of descriptors for Coin, Sword, Tipi, and Baseball (illustrating Indexical Authenticity).

Besides having a high correlation of pairings, these items also share the characteristic of not being generally available in the retail marketplace. Not surprisingly, subjects focused on the “historical” aspect of these items – a more indexical understanding of the symbolic understanding of these items.

Another contrasting example will help further illustrate this assertion. Figure 5 shows a word cloud constructed from the terms used to describe the Hand-tied fishing fly and the Tipi. This group is formed by excluding the items pairings with the historical objects of the coin and the sword. Thus these would presumably be items which are less historical in nature; thus perhaps they do not carry as much of the indexical aspect of authenticity in their understanding by the subjects.



Figure 5. Word Cloud of descriptors for Hand-Tied fishing fly and Tipi (indicating removal of “purely historical” items and a lessening of indexical authenticity)

As we can see, a new term rises to the forefront. The historical aspect is still present, however a different set of descriptors enters. “Cultural” takes center stage, with symbolic descriptors such as “handmade” and “traditional” assuming increased importance. This appears to be a clearly different understanding of authenticity.

Then we compare this to the word cloud created using the terms associated with Air-Jordan Shoes, Coke, and the Apple MacBook (excluding the sweater and the hat as discussed above):



Figure 6. Word Cloud for Air-Jordan shoes, Coke, and Apple Mac Book (illustrating Aesthetic Authenticity)

Aside from the obvious differences in the terms used, there are other factors which the word clouds illustrate. Figure 4 shows a near unanimity regarding the term “historical” followed by a scattering of smaller, lesser used words to describe the items. On the other hand, this figure (figure 6) shows a large agreement regarding the term “branded” with several other “medium sized” words which demonstrate perhaps a broader subject understanding of the authenticity of these items – items which they identify as “authentic”, but not in a historical, indexical sense of the term as suggested in the items in figure 4, but the more modern understanding of an aesthetically authentic product available in the marketplace as seen in the items in figure 5. Again, similar to figure 5, the clear indexical understanding that was seen in figure 4 is not present. Note that the terms “legitimate” and “cultural” appear to play a larger role in the understanding of these popular branded goods, mirroring many of the salient aspects of aesthetic authenticity cited in the previous literature.

Interview Analysis

The overall purpose for the interviews was to investigate whether aspects of the previously defined “aesthetic authenticity” appeared to be present in the subject’s understandings of the general concept of authenticity. Thus it was necessary to probe their understanding of several different aspects of authenticity in the interviews. Not surprisingly, the subjects did exhibit understandings of several previously identified aspects of authenticity which confirmed and/or shed additional light on previous research as suggested.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. The interviews were analyzed and coded in two ways. First they were carefully read through several times as individual conversations captured in textual form to gain an overall sense of the subject’s general “take” on the overall concept of authenticity. In other words, only through a careful reading of the entire interview could the researcher attempt to understand particular meanings and nuances of terms given by the subject. This is especially important given Foucault’s insights on the use of text as outlined by Prior (2004).

However, in addition the texts were coded according to particular subjects and topics which recurred throughout all the interviews as a result of the semi-structured interview process (Thomas 2003). Pieces of all the interview texts (retaining the subject ID numbers) were then collected and organized into several collective documents which served as summaries of all the interview content related to a particular stimulus, hypothetical situation, or other topic. Thus, the researcher could use these summaries to

quickly and easily read all the different responses about a particular topic and compare them to the responses on another topic. Because of the inclusion of the subject ID numbers, recurrent, interesting and/or unusual responses across the summaries could be analyzed to ensure they were not due to particular subject idiosyncrasies, etc.

Indexical Authenticity

The first is Indexical authenticity as suggested by Grayson and Martinec (2004). Indexical authenticity is suggested to exist in products or artifacts which can trace a direct physical and temporal correspondence or linkage to a historical time or actual historical figure. In discussions surrounding the stimulus items of the 12th century medieval coin, George Washington's sword, and the Babe Ruth signed baseball, nearly all subjects clearly exhibited an understanding of indexical authenticity as outlined in the research. In addition, a majority of subjects grouped these items together, demonstrating that their understanding of this category of items exists as a somewhat distinct mental construct.

One key concept linked to indexical authenticity by the subjects was the limited number of these items, most often as a result of their age, with age being an additional key ingredient. Comments from two subjects clearly echo the majority of the interviewees with regard to their limited nature and age:

"...with these it's old, it has the past like, I don't know, there's for real one of these, or very few of these...like Nike shoes there's millions of Nike shoes, there's probably only a couple signed Babe Ruth baseballs." (Subject #27)

"Um, like George Washington's sword, there is probably only one of them. The European Medieval coins, I mean there can't be very many of those – they were only around for a short time..." (Subject #32)

As we will see below, this is a common theme that runs through many of the evident aspects of authenticity, however it is especially prevalent in this context. As to age, this exchange captures a sentiment that was also seen in a large percentage of the interviewees:

I - "Can you think of other items that might also fit in that category [termed 'original']?"

S - "Something like maybe some original tools that people way back when, you know 1800s used maybe. I don't know.. Maybe even like cave paintings, real old items, just that kind of things." (Subject #40)

Another theme that is seen with regard to indexical authenticity is a certain "specialness" or characteristic which subjects find difficult to describe. As we saw in the word cloud they use terms like "collectible", "unique", "non-everyday" and "uncommon" to describe why this indexically authentic aspect of the item exists.

"I feel it's on a different level..." (Subject #27)

I - "What is it about that group9 (sword, coin, Tipi, tamale) that stands out to you as being authentic?"

S - "Um.. Like that its authentic, the coin from medieval times.. Its just um... I don't know. I don't know really how to describe it like.." (Subject #50)

Lastly, the indexical understandings of authenticity expressed in this study's context appear to share a focus on specific or important historical figures. In other words, an item that was signed by an anonymous historical person (in the context of the interviews this was presented as "Joe Blow, Babe Ruth's team mate who sat on the bench") was seen to have a very different type of authenticity (if any at all) as the autographed Babe Ruth baseball. This is also developed in more depth in the discussion

of iconic authenticity which follows. The following exchange helps illuminate this clear distinction in the eyes of several subjects:

I – “OK- So now in order for this coin to go into this category with George Washington’s sword, or the baseball, um this was the timeless group, if this was a coin that Louis the 14th had in his pocket would that change things?”

S – “I feel like that would change things because that puts a name with it rather than just a culture and a time period. I think if it was his actual coin it would switch because then it’s those are coins of his.”

I – “OK”

S – “Which I think would be like George Washington’s sword. There’s only one of them. Rather than just from that’s from that culture it’s from a person in that culture.”

This comment and others like it also foreshadow the concept of aesthetic authenticity which is discussed further below.

Iconic Authenticity

Iconic authenticity was also suggested by Grayson and Martinec. Iconic authenticity is where something is made in a fashion similar to an indexically authentic items, thus it shares those characteristics, but does not have the physical or temporal connection to the past. This understanding did not emerge as clearly as did the indexical authenticity. The stimulus designed to be associated with this was the “New Buffalo Hide Tipi”, however it appeared that many of the subjects did not pay close attention to the description and just classified it as a “Tipi” with the fact that it was new appearing somewhat irrelevant. Subsequent discussion regarding this item revealed that this was a tough concept to introduce, as subjects tended to focus on the cultural aspect of the stimuli. In other words, the historicity of its use for American Indians became the focus of the concept similar to how the tamales were associated with Mexican culture. The

following discourse shows how one subject initially viewed the tipi – the subsequent clarification illustrates that the newness of the tipi was a secondary characteristic that did not appear to factor into his initial analysis of the stimulus:

S – “So I think in my mind the older these products are the more authentic they are...because they withstood the test of time and...”

I – “And that kind of seems to echo to some degree what you were saying about the teepee.”

S – “Umm... if I was certain it was made the exact same way like used the same methods um then like I would think it would be more authentic than just me seeing a teepee that’s made.”

I – “Like you go instead and you see the things are 2X4’s instead of sticks.”

S – “Right. So if the thing was made like it was or used to be and made the same then my view would change of being authentic it would be more authentic.”
(subject #67)

This is stated even more directly as follows:

I – “Can you elaborate a little bit more on what you mean by culture?”

S – “Um like the teepee for Indians and Mexican food for Mexican...” (Subject #71)

The concept of iconic authenticity was also introduced in the interviews using a hypothetical situation designed to draw a contrast between the stimulus of the 12th century medieval coin and an “authentic reproduction” which might be found at a modern day Medieval Fair or Renaissance Festival. Subjects were near universal in their insistence that such an item would not be considered authentic, as seen by their answers to the following question (paraphrased):

“What if you were at a Medieval or Renaissance type fair and they were making “authentic” coins by taking a piece of silver and hitting it with a hammer on a die, just like they did 1000 years ago?”

“I wouldn’t consider it authentic. Because these coins stood the test of time by like 1000 years ago. The coins they just made were made like 10 minutes ago. And the people making them weren’t living in this time, for the old coin.” (Subject #50)

“Uh I wouldn’t really consider it to be authentic because it’s not worth anything right now. Just the fact that that was their currency back then that would just make it more authentic to me it was actually in being used back in the medieval or whatever period.” (Subject #61)

Once again we can also see that some of the aspects of the other concepts are making an appearance, especially in the existential arena. In addition, it is difficult to generalize this finding in light of the inherent bias in the design of the data collection. These responses must clearly be understood as being in contrast to the previously discussed “authentic” 12th century coin used in the sorting exercise with the subject.

Given the fact that these understandings of the iconic authenticity concept were offered in relation to an already well-established indexical authenticity concept in the subject’s mind, what this might illustrate is the relative power of both the well-known primacy effect as well as the relative strength of the iconic authenticity concept itself. In the vernacular of the subjects, indexically authentic items are considered “really” authentic, while iconic items are only “technically” authentic. Examples are seen such as:

“Yeah but it’s a copy cat because there was already an original coin that was made 100s of years ago but now they are copying off of and you can’t use it anymore it’s not it’s just for fun and they’re copying off the original.” (Subject #35)”

“That’s borderline authentic to me. Yeah its made the way they use to make it, but its still current to me” (Subject #53)

What we see is that it is clearly a more nuanced understanding of the many ways that people understand the meaning of the authenticity concept as a whole.

Existential Authenticity

As discussed in chapter two, existential authenticity as posited by Wang (1999) is related to personal experience. In that context, it was focused on the experiences of tourists and how they decided whether they had enjoyed an authentic experience. In this tourism context there were definite cultural overtones, as the social interactions with “native” people and observations during cultural events and activities were described as what defined an authentic existential tourist experience. This was seen most readily in the interviews surrounding the stimuli of the tipi and the tamales. It was further developed during the interviews using a hypothetical experience surrounding Mexican food. In Goulding (2000), existential authenticity was characterized by visitors to an historic site feeling alienated from the present and looking for link to an idealized past. Aspects of this construct were seen in discussions regarding the tipi, the tamales and the handmade fly, which in addition were also characterized as being “old” by several subjects.

The cultural angle on existential authenticity was most seen when subjects discussed the tamales and the tipi. As discussed earlier, the tipi was not initially designed to elicit commentary on the cultural association but rather the fact that it was a newly-made thing that might be considered old-fashioned. However the subjects focused on the cultural aspects of it and linked it to the cultural aspects of the tamales – in many cases identifying it as “foreign” or grouping it with things that were “not American”(!). Thus

this confusion made the subject commentary regarding some aspects of this stimulus less than reliable, and a decision was made to focus on the Mexican cultural aspect of the tamale stimulus instead.

During the interviews subjects were asked if they liked or had eaten Mexican food. They were then asked if they were familiar with signs on many of these restaurants which advertised “Authentic Mexican Food”. In all cases where this was discussed (22/25 interviews) the subjects agreed and were familiar with Mexican restaurants and the fact that they often advertise that they serve “authentic” food. Subjects were then asked what that meant to them. Questions asked were similar to: “What does ‘authentic’ Mexican food mean to you?” and “What do you expect to see if a restaurant advertises ‘authentic’ Mexican food?” The responses seemed somewhat equally centered around three basic themes, the décor, the taste of the food, and the ethnicity of the workers. Aspects of existential authenticity can be seen in all three of these themes, and in the last one, the ethnicity of the workers, we get a direct linkage to the emergence of aesthetic authenticity.

Subjects who identified décor as being an essential aspect of an authentic Mexican restaurant clearly expressed existential rationales during the discussion. In other words, these subjects felt that an authentic setting was important for the experience of authenticity.

“And I think I mean when you go into a place that is decorated correctly and playing Spanish music and has Spanish descent waiters it makes it a lot more authentic. I think it’s more of the atmosphere than the actual food that makes it more authentic.” (Subject#57)

“[It] wouldn’t really be authentic to me if I drove through and got this like a box.” (Subject #43)

“ [Local restaurant] is really decorated to look like you are in a Mexican restaurant, and I think that is something they use to sell the authentic part.” (Subject #53)

In these cases, the décor provides cultural cues that serve as evidence that an authentic experience is being had.

The taste of the food is the second existential theme that emerged. These subjects have direct experience with Mexican food either through their family and/or friends, or through travel to Mexico and neighboring Central American countries. For these two representative subjects, authenticity is determined through the actual taste of the food.

“Well for me my mom and grandparents are Mexican and so I’ve grown up around what I guess I would consider real Mexican food because my grandma’s made all these home dishes from scratch and so a lot times when I’m at different Mexican restaurants I can taste similarity to what I’ve had in the past.” (Subject #23)

“I’ve been to Mexico and eaten real Mexican food, and most stuff you get in the states is not even comparable. Not that it doesn’t taste good but its just different.” (Subject #47)

This understanding of authenticity is probably the closest analogue to existential authenticity as suggested by Wang (1999) because it so unambiguously relies on direct experience.

However in this third example, when subjects identify existential authenticity with regard to the ethnicity of the workers, they come very close to suggesting that something quite different is occurring. It is here that we see another brush with aesthetic

authenticity, because the fact of their Hispanic or Mexican ethnicity appears to impart something to the food which makes it authentic.

“Um because I mean you can walk into a place that has the authentic Mexican food sign and there’s all American citizens that have no Mexican descent working in there and you’re like how can this be authentic?.” (Subject #57)

“I don’t know if this is wrong [to say], but if it says real authentic food... you go inside and the people are working in there are Mexican. (chuckles)” (Subject #43)

Interestingly as seen above, several times the subjects realize that something about this suggestion or statement feels wrong, and so they laugh, or struggle to clarify by suggesting that Hispanic or Mexican people will know particular recipes. Regardless, what becomes clear about these subjects is that authentic Mexican food is made by Mexican (or Hispanic) people. Clearly this is a link to the concept of aesthetic authenticity. In other words, to these subjects it appears obvious that the consummate Mexican chef will be Mexican, and that authentic Mexican food will be made by this “type” of chef. What we will see in the later section on aesthetic authenticity, one aspect of this is created when a product or service is somehow imbued with what is termed *consummate experience*, which will be discussed in more detail below.

The stimuli of the tamale, the tipi, and the hand-tied fishing fly were also seen as being linked together because they were all items that were made by hand. This characteristic gave them an existential authenticity that appeared even closer to the concept of aesthetic authenticity for several reasons. Many times the subjects would use terms like “really” authentic, or somehow express that this aspect of authenticity was at or near the core of what they understood to be existential authenticity in general. The fact

that a person made the item and it was not made by a machine was very important in most instances where this was discussed. The following subjects tell why handmade things matter to them:

"I feel like because not a lot of stuff is handmade now days. And whenever you see something handmade – 'ohh that's handmade' - I want to get it." (Subject #27)

"Um that one is basically just like how it's made, like it's authentic because it's handmade." (Subject #82)

The first one actually illustrates and supports the existential component, as well as an acknowledgement of the aforementioned alienation that many consumers experience in the marketplace.

Another key aspect of the existential aspect of authentic handmade products is temporal issues. In one case, a subject suggests that there is an added incentive to purchase something handmade because later it may not be available:

"I think sometimes too it just kind of is something about the rarity of it, like if you're at an art festival and you see something that maybe you like, you're like 'well if I don't purchase it now I may not be able to get it' because only this person makes this type of earrings or necklace or whatever." (Subject #82)

However more importantly than this admittedly relatively superficial temporal issue, and more closely linked to Goulding's (2000) conception of existential authenticity as a link to an idealized past, is how a large percentage of the subjects spoke of these handmade objects in that fashion *without* being prompted by the stimuli or the interviewer. In other words, when discussing the temporally neutral stimuli of the tamale with mole sauce, the hand tied fly-fishing lure and the new (!) buffalo hide tipi, subjects described them in

terms relating to the past, how they were used and/or made for utilitarian purposes, and their role in people's lives as lived in the past.

"I mean I'm not sure how old the fishing lure is but I know back in the older days you know 1800s or what not like everything was handmade it wasn't on a assembly line, everything was custom. I look at stuff like that, I think of stuff that you know, could have fed a family back then. Authentic is like okay for the tamales recipes passed down from you know grandmother to daughter ...for generations...the hand tied fly fishing lure I mean that's something that a father teaches his son or daughter ...for the most part something that is passed down from one to another makes them authentic, makes them original." (Subject #86)

"Umm.. someone put a lot of effort into it and they are doing it by hand and care more about it. Um... They were making it for a specific purpose, put more effort into it." (Subject #50)

I – "I want to talk about the Indian teepee - it's a new buffalo hide tipi. What is it can you tell me about the authenticity in the tipi?"

S – "I think it's um, just the fact that its apart of history apart of and I think it's cool that people can still out and still like in Wyoming and they still have reserves set up like they were in the old times and you go and experience it like it would have been 100 years ago and it's just an experience for people. I think they would just like it look at it and see how Native Americans used to live and do things and make their homes." (Subject #16)

Here we also see aspects of a different authenticity emerge from what was previously defined as something existentially authentic. What emerges here is also an aspect self-identity, of self-actualization as seen when the person puts more effort into something they are making for themselves. As we will see below, this is another aspect of aesthetic authenticity.

Aesthetic Authenticity

As I have shown, aesthetic authenticity is seen or touched upon in the margins of the discussions regarding the previously posited constructs of authenticity. It combines elements of Dewey's aesthetic ethics regarding human behavior related to consummatory experience and the applied aesthetics related to cultural products found in the marketing literature. This has served to this point to help locate this construct in relation to these others. However, this construct does make an appearance in its own right. It is here where we see many clear examples of this aspect of the larger authenticity concept. In this study, aesthetic authenticity becomes most evident in the discussions surrounding the subject groupings of the Michael Jordan "Air-Jordan" shoes, Coca-Cola, and the Apple Mac-book computer. In addition, some clear distinctions of aesthetic authenticity as related to the other aspects is seen in discussions contrasting the "Air-Jordan" shoes and the Babe Ruth baseball. Lastly, several examples which support and illustrate the construct in more detail are also brought forward and discussed.

As seen in figure 2 and discussed in detail above, subjects clearly felt there was an affinity between the Micheal Jordan "Air-Jordan" shoes, Coca-Cola, and the Apple Mac-book computer. Again, these are all very well-known brands, yet aside from that characteristic, there is very little about these products that is similar. They do not carry any aspect of indexical authenticity (a direct temporal/historical linkage to the past) and with the exception of the "secret recipe" of the Coca-Cola, there is also very little iconic authenticity present in these items. With regard to existential authenticity, there does not seem to be any cultural significance or link to an idealized past with these items, except again with Coca-Cola and an "Americana" image that was mentioned by two subjects. Yet, in a previous study (Mason 2007) from a very similar subject pool these three items

were identified as some of the “most authentic” brands or products on the market. One subject clearly lays out this contention as follows:

S – “...I don’t know how to tell you but I know there’s that type of person that just I think it’s because it’s in a class of its own.”

I – “Oh, tell me more about that class of its own.”

S – “I think it’s held to higher standards than most anything else and its got I mean its got the Mac book and it has the IPod the iPhone and all of that and other competing products in lines have tried to do that but they can’t do it as well. It’s high quality.”

I – “So it has something to do with the quality and the fact that it’s in a class of its own. Are there other products that you see here that are similar in your mind that might have that same like characteristic?”

S – “Coca-Cola probably and then maybe the Jordan shoes.” (Subject #16)

I contend that the authenticity contained in these products is aesthetic authenticity. This is because the authenticity in these particular products is inherent in the products themselves, the products are mass produced by companies that are very concerned about their image, the products have been carefully advertised and promoted using symbolic meanings which acknowledge the role the product plays in self-identity and allow the consumer to construct a self-actualizing identity which includes an association with consummate experience. Not every aesthetically authentic product or service contains all of these aspects, but some or most of these aspects will be present will serve to identify a product or service as such. In the following examples I will identify several excerpts from interviews where consumers exhibit these specific understandings about the stimuli. Afterwards I will follow that with examples that show subjects incorporating several of

these aspects in one description or passage that illustrates this concept as a unified concept – the concept of aesthetic authenticity.

I will begin by showing how these products are understood by consumers to be part of a company or brand family that is very image conscious. This concern for image is critical when we understand (as outlined in chapter 2) how closely we as consumers identify who we are through the things that we own. The following subject clearly understands this process:

S – “There is obviously history behind all these products too so just I mean I just know whenever I see that apple or that Jordan I just know it comes from good stuff.”

I – “Good stuff?”

S – “Like good history, I never really heard anything bad about either of the companies.” (Subject #61)

We can see that the salience of this image transfer process is even more accentuated in this subject’s exchange:

S – “This person (with Coke and Air Jordan’s) would ...place more importance in their image I would say than the person with the sweater and the fishing lure.”

I – “OK- Can you tell me more about this?”

S – “...The computer and the shoes it’s more of a branding thing. You have Nike shoes, it’s not just any basketball shoes. You’ve got the Apple computer which is a more stylish than regular PC and a bottle of Coca-Cola like it’s an actual brand of soda, it’s not like the (generic) brand. So this person...is more into how the image they are portraying.” (Subject #7)

In other words, with aesthetically authentic products consumers understand that the image associated with the product becomes especially tied to the image of the purchaser

or user. Thus, brands and products in this category take great steps to enhance and protect their company image. The effects of this will be seen below.

Secondly, these products are also advertised and promoted using especially symbolic meanings and impressions. All three of these products fall into this category – they all incorporate immediately recognizable symbols that are widely understood around the globe. The familiar Apple with a bite taken out of it, #23 Michael Jordan going up for a dunk with the Nike Swoosh, and the distinctive curve of a Coke bottle are images that nearly every subject could immediately identify.

“They’re just really popular name brands... it’s kind of hard to hide (the) authenticity when there is a Nike swoosh or the Apple logo or Coco-Cola bottle to hide that it’s not authentic.” (Subject #20)

However more importantly than these familiar logos is the imagery that these brands use in their advertising. Coca-Cola has managed their brand around such readily identifiable thematic images as Santa Claus, and established a close linkage to “Americana” to the extent that it is recognized around the world as an American product. That subjects recognized this symbolism was especially evident in many of the interviews:

“I think it you know like if you’re drinking the glass bottle of Coke you can see like the old commercials with the kids on the dirt roads running and playing and having a Coke...I mean [it] has a feeling you know because you’ve seen all the old Coke machines and all the old commercials and the pictures you know?” (Subject #57)

“...The commercials and everything they’ve had puts so much emphasis on how long they’ve been around and how long it’s been such a well-known brand and how they have the same recipe forever.” (Subject #59)

The symbolism behind these advertisements is unmistakable. A cursory analysis of the advertisements these subjects are describing shows that what is advertised is not the product, but what the product represents – and this is a highly symbolic advertising concept.

A third characteristic of these products is how they are used to promote personal identity and a sense of self-actualization. Once again, consumers know that the products they purchase and use become associated with them. They understand that people judge them to a certain degree based on these associations, and they cannot but help to make these judgments about themselves as well. Once again this understanding is clearly seen in the comments by the subjects.

S – “I know I mean when I was growing up I had different, I definitely had some Air Jordans... I would wear Kobe Bryant’s or Allen Iverson’s but yeah I mean...they wear that shoe it makes you want to buy it.”

I – “And why is that?”

S – “Um just because when you’re young you look up to them. I mean some people probably think they will play better in them or whatever. They see them on TV all the time wearing those kind of want to associate themselves with that person.”(Subject #32)

“I mean Michael Jordan was an amazing basketball player so the fact that you think ‘oh wow I put on these shoes I might be like Michael Jordan’ you know...I feel like more authentic because it relates back to him, it may not be his shoes but he’s the one that sponsors it and all of that ...rather than just if those were just regular brand Nike shoes.” (Subject #64)

In these interviews, the subjects clearly identified that the shoes make them feel a particular way, that (in a foreshadowing of the last characteristic) perhaps some aspect of

the superstar athlete will rub off on them and perhaps make them a better player. The first subject (new7) above goes on to elaborate how this makes him appear to his friends as well as to himself:

S – “If you were with your friends and you had some, I don’t know- practice player, like if he had some pair of shoes I feel like you wouldn’t show those off. I mean if you got some Jordan’s I mean you can show those to your friends or I know I would.”

I – “Right. OK- So it’s that connection to famous people thats increasing the authenticity?”

S – “It just makes you feel I mean probably better about yourself. You have a certain pair of shoes.. .”(Subject #32)

To clarify – products with aesthetic authenticity tend to incorporate or accentuate aspects relating to personal identity and and/or self-actualization or improvement.

The last characteristic of aesthetic authenticity is that it reflects or partakes in an aspect of consummate experience. As defined in chapter 2, one way to define consummate experience is when any ordinary activity is undertaken for its own fulfillment. In one of these cases, consummate experience is seen when one person who performs an ordinary activity such as basketball becomes the epitome of what a basketball player should be. This is obviously the case with Michael Jordan. In another case, a simple carbonated beverage (Coca-Cola) becomes the defining example of what a “cola” (or in some cases, a soda) should be – it fulfills the category. And in the last case, a computer company – Apple - decides to move in a different direction from all the other computer companies and compete in a different environment. It defined itself according to its own set of principles and ideals and managed to survive, and eventually prosper.

All three of these products or brands partake in some aspect of consummate experience through either their founding stories, and/or their commitment to excellence.

Look at how three different subjects refer to these three products using terms or references which bring to mind a connection to consummate experience:

“And so Apple is unique in the fact that there’s really no one that does what they do.” (Subject #23)

“There is no other shoe like Nike shoes.” (Subject #27)

“I think...there’s nothing quite like Coke and it’s its own thing, and no one else can replicate it.” (Subject #59)

For these subjects, these three products are the epitome of their product class, if they are even willing to admit that there is anything that can even be in their class. This is a clear example of how an aspect of consummate experience is associated with these products. In addition, subjects identified these products as being unique, so in a sense they become their own fulfillment when they emerge from ordinary beginnings, become successful, and create their own class. This understanding is exemplified as follows:

“Well when they’re first created um it kind of changed the whole market. Like there was no other Coca-Cola before Coke was invented. There were PCs for apple but they redid the whole thing and kind of turned the PC upside down [when] they were invented.”(Subject #35)

Thus the ways in which subjects identify how these three products show evidence of consummate experience serve to illuminate this last aspect of aesthetic authenticity.

In many cases subjects appear to identify more than one aspect of aesthetic authenticity in their interviews. In this example, the subject discusses the consummate experience embodied in the shoes, the symbolic meaning of who Michael Jordan is and

was in the basketball community, and how the “Air-Jordan” shoes relate to the subject and his peers’ self-image:

“Uh he is one of the greatest athletes there ever was. I mean even though he’s still regarded as one of the best NBA players ever, I mean he still has more respect in that community and in the sports community and he always kind of made people push themselves to be better. I mean they saw what he could do and they figure well why can’t I do that and they pushed themselves.”(Subject #86)

In a different example, here the subject is discussing the authenticity of Lady Gaga and her music:

S – “It would be authentic to me because Lady Gaga does have mounds of character. Um, yeah I would say that it would be authentic.”

I – “OK- And what makes it kind of different?”

S – “I think it’s easier to understand the concept of authenticity when it surrounding a person because [with] Lady Gaga I would correlate authenticity towards originality or something like that. So Lady Gaga is very original and I would say that she is very authentic...she did something so crazy and totally off the wall on her own but look at her now, she’s super famous.” (Subject #7)

For this subject, Lady Gaga exhibits “character” and “originality”, two very symbolic attributes. In addition, she appeared to exhibit some aspect of consummate experience as well as careful image management, exemplified by the fact that this subject characterized her as doing something “crazy and totally off the wall” yet still becoming successful. In a striking contrast, this subject shows how aesthetic authenticity can also be lost:

I – “Can you give an example or maybe someone who either is authentic, or that seemed to be and wasn’t?”

S – “Well Britney Spears at one point seemed to be and then wasn’t.”

I – “What made her seem to be and what happened to make her to where she wasn’t?”

S – “Well she seemed to be when she was innocent when she was younger and not into bad things and then she wasn’t when she shaved her head and had a baby and went crazy”. (Subject #59)

In this case, we see how a very successful singer loses control through mental illness, her image suffers, and as a result a sense of her authenticity - aesthetic authenticity - in the public’s eye is lost.

In conclusion, what I have done in this chapter is to carefully analyze the data that was collected in the study. Through this multi-pronged analysis, I have shown how the concept of aesthetic authenticity as hypothesized in chapter two was revealed in the responses to the stimuli presented during the grouping process and the subsequent interviews. The aspects of a carefully controlled image, the use of symbolic imagery, the connection to the product that consumers make with respect to their self-identity, and the link to consummate experience all serve as markers which indicate the presence of aesthetic authenticity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

What I have demonstrated through these analyses is the existence of an aspect of authenticity which I call “aesthetic authenticity”. I suggest that aesthetic authenticity is something which has been present in the academic marketing literature for at least a decade, but which has not been fully articulated. What I have done is design a study based on an understanding of authenticity in the marketing literature, as approached through the viewpoint of sociological theory and literature. Sociological insights primarily from Marx, Dewey, and Ritzer (to name the most notable contributors) opened new avenues to better understand insights on the topic of authenticity in the marketing literature and suggested key points of departure that were heretofore not readily apparent.

From Marx came the idea of alienation, the separation of human beings from the inherent meaning and the close interactions they shared with each other in their day to day labor in the pre-industrial age. The critical theorists of the Frankfurt school were curious why this increasing alienation did not lead the working class to greater class consciousness and eventual revolution. I showed one possible answer through Ritzer’s analysis of increasing consumerism in modern society and suggested it could have served as a palliative to this tendency. Lastly I showed how Dewey’s

insight about aesthetics and experience provided some insights on how to bridge the marketing literature's emphasis on cultural objects with the social properties of authenticity to illustrate the way these concepts operate in the marketplace to provide this hypothesized palliative function.

In the literature review I first outlined the general understanding of the authenticity concept in the marketing literature. What this revealed was the breakdown of this concept into smaller constructs described as indexical (direct spatio-temporal connection), iconic (made to appear like an original) and existential (possessing cultural or experiential aspects). Through this process, insight from Marx suggested the possibility that what he characterized as alienation could possibly serve as a trigger or stimulus to the consumer urge for authenticity in general. This was further investigated through an understanding of the alienation concept related to authenticity as suggested by critical theorists such as Adorno. The potential social effects of this were brought forward through commentary from Ritzer, who posited how these effects become more apparent through history to the present. Lastly, the understanding of consummate experience as one mechanism for the transfer of these ideas as suggested by John Dewey helps to coalesce the hypothesized theoretical processes into a unified whole.

In the methods chapter, I outlined the process which I used to collect the data for the study. I used a somewhat unorthodox procedure, utilizing aspects of grounded theory, as well as elements of both quantitative methods and qualitative interviews. The concept of bricolage was incorporated into the method, with the ultimate goal of a clearer illumination of consumer understanding of the authenticity concept.

Lastly in the analysis chapter I showed how the careful amalgamation of disparate data sets served to illuminate the characteristics of both the previously suggested authenticity constructs seen in the marketing literature as well as a place for and the existence of the aesthetic authenticity construct that was originally hypothesized. This construct fits well into the existing literature and provides a more complete picture of the authenticity concept as a whole.

With regard to applications of this research, there are several opportunities which are immediately apparent. First would to use these findings to construct an “authenticity” scale which researchers could use to assess consumer understandings of various products. Using the sematic insights, construction and refinement of such a scale could prove very useful to researchers in the consumer behavior, retailing, and other related marketing areas.

The social psychological aspect of this research is another area which could be impacted by this research. A topic such as the nascent sociology of consumerism (Kennedy and Krogman 2008) should find this entire study particularly relevant. A more established field such as identity formation will likely focus more on the suggested way that consumers use aesthetically authentic objects in their daily lives as an ongoing part of that identity formation process.

Another potential application would be to further test the existence of these authenticity constructs and better define their relationships within the overall authenticity concept. As was seen in the finding, the borders of these constructs are not clearly

defined – more research in this area would help to assist other researchers who find applications for investigating the authenticity concept in general.

This will not be the last study of this topic by the researcher. However it did serve as an important learning tool, and the mistakes acknowledged throughout the dissertation show points where improvements can be made and possible starting points for concurrent and additional research. As part of the data collection process, information about the media usage of the subjects was collected but not used in this analysis. Analysis of this data could provide additional insight into how media consumption has the potential to impact consumer perceptions of authenticity as already outlined in the dissertation. Additionally as demonstrated, the hard work of creating a methodological and analytical framework for conducting this future research has already been done. This will facilitate these future studies introducing different stimuli, and/or making comparisons between groups of subjects based on media consumption or other factors heretofore not previously considered.

In conclusion, this research has served to better illuminate the somewhat murky atmosphere which surrounds the concept of authenticity in the marketplace. It has long been known that authenticity was a characteristic or attribute which consumers demanded in the products they purchase, however the relationship between this type of authenticity and personal authenticity has never been clearly articulated. It is my hope that this research has served to better describe the constructs related to the authenticity concept and offer a suggestion for how the picture of a very complex idea can be improved through the additional construct of aesthetic authenticity. I challenge future researchers to

use this study as a beginning point to go further and continue to illuminate this fascinating topic.

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APPENDIX A

Script, responses, and sample questions for grouping exercise and interviews:

During initial interviews, subjects were told the following:

This interview revolves around the topic of authenticity in the marketplace. Researchers in the field have suggested there is more than one type of authenticity, but there is very little agreement about what these types are and what it is that defines them. Because I am investigating this concept, I'm not going to tell you what these are – I want to get your opinion. It's very important for you to know that this is NOT a test – there are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. I also want to remind you about the IRB and confidentiality agreement we discussed. It is with this in mind that I want to ask you to do the following: Please take a look at these index cards – on each is a picture of an item that may or may not be considered authentic in some way. I would like you to take five minutes and group these cards into at least two categories based on different aspects of their authenticity. If you finish earlier, please tell the researcher you are done. If you do not finish in five minutes, we will continue the interview using the partial groups you created.

In the case that subjects asked multiple questions or attempted to give up during the grouping process, researcher answers/statements were created as follows:

- *"I can't tell you what I mean by authenticity – that is what we are attempting to learn in the study"*
- *"If you don't think something is authentic, make a group for that too"*
- *"There is no right answer, just organize them as best you can"*
- *"I am interested in your opinion, there is no correct answer"*
- *"Please create at least two groups – you may create as many as you wish"*
- *"I cannot tell you any more information – it is important to keep the process the same for everyon"*

- *“You are free to stop and you will still receive the extra credit (or other incentive) – however I encourage you to continue if possible”*

After subjects were asked to give titles to the categories they created, follow-up questions were asked such as:

- *“You grouped (item a, b, and c) together. Why?”*
- *“Is there some characteristic that (item a, b, and c) share? Please tell me more about this characteristic”*
- *“What makes the items in group (a, b, and c) authentic? Where did it come from?”*
- *“What name or names would you give to the type of authenticity that (a, b, and c) share? Why?”*
- *“What is it about group (d, e, and f) that makes them NOT authentic?”*
- *“What are the differences between (a, b, and c) and (g, h, and i) with regard to their authenticity? Why do these differences matter?”*

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument – (*Completed by Subject alone*)

Grouping Document – (*Completed by Subject and Researcher together*)

Subject #_____

_____ Watch television: _____ < 5 hrs/week
 _____ 5-10 hrs/week
 _____ 10-20 hrs/week
 _____ > 20 hrs/week

_____ Listen to Radio: _____ < 2 hrs/week
 _____ 2-5 hrs/week
 _____ 5-10 hrs/week
 _____ > 10 hrs/week

_____ Use Internet _____ < 2 hrs/week
 _____ 2-5 hrs/week
 _____ 5-10 hrs/week
 _____ 10-20 hrs/week
 _____ > 20 hrs/week

_____ Read Periodicals _____ < 1 hr/week
 (Newspapers and _____ 1-2 hrs/week
 and Magazines _____ 2-5 hrs/week
 _____ > 5 hrs/week

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Neutral ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Neutral ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

Intended Major: _____ Minor _____

Gender: _____ Age: _____ Race/Ethnicity: _____
Number of years living in USA: _____ Country of Origin (if not USA) _____

“When I was growing up, I considered my family to be _____ class.”

☐ lower
☐ lower middle
☐ middle
☐ upper middle
☐ upper

Group #1 Title:_____

Group #2 Title:_____

Group #3 Title:_____

Group #4 Title:_____

Group #5 Title:_____

Group #6 Title:_____

Group #7 Title:_____

Group #8 Title:_____

APPENDIX C

Images presented as stimuli for grouping procedure on individual 4" x 6" index cards:

- 1) 12th Century Medieval Coin
- 2) George Washington's Sword
- 3) Nike "Air-Jordan" Basketball Shoes
- 4) Hand-Tied Fly-Fishing Lure
- 5) New Buffalo-Skin Tipi
- 6) Bottle of Coca-Cola
- 7) Norwegian Fisherman's Sweater
- 8) Baseball Signed by Babe Ruth
- 9) Hank Williams Style of Country Music
- 10) Apple Macbook Computer
- 11) Tamales with Molé Sauce
- 12) Sherlock Holmes style Hat



12th Century Medieval Coin



George Washington's Sword



Nike “Air Jordan” Basketball Shoes



Hand Tied Fly-Fishing Lure



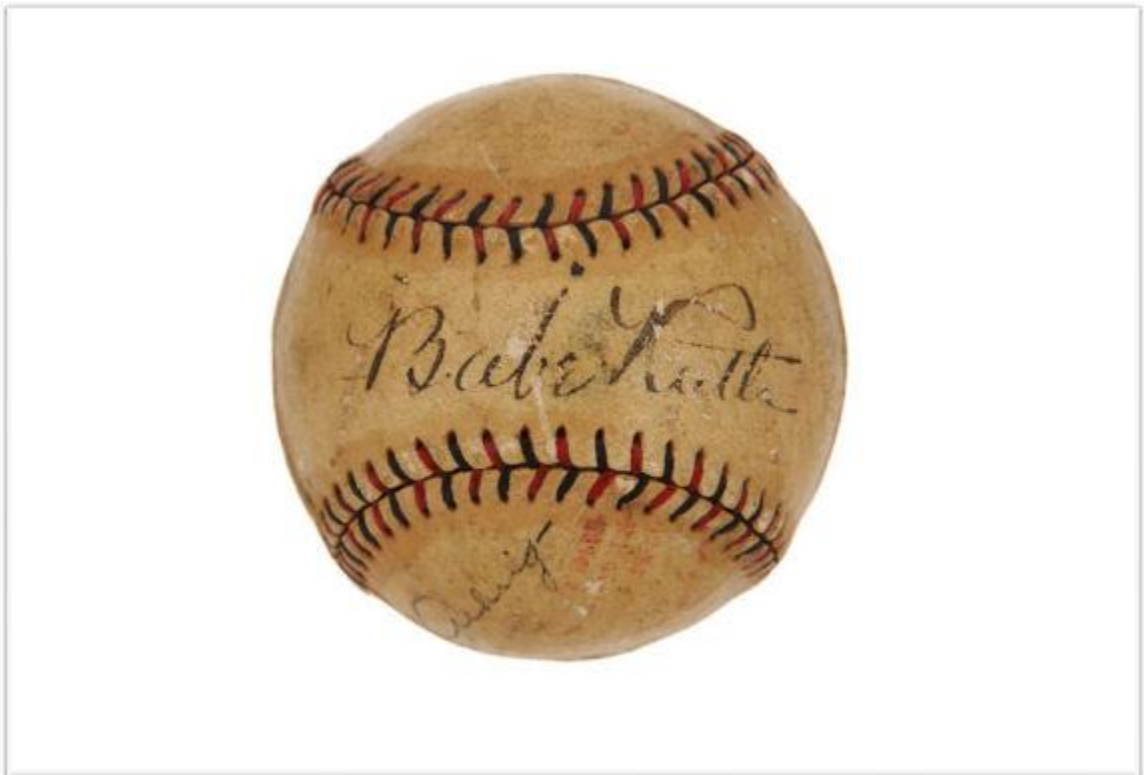
New Buffalo-Skin Tipi



Bottle of Coca-Cola



Norwegian Fisherman's Sweater



Baseball Signed by Babe Ruth



Hank Williams Style of Country Music



Apple Macbook Computer



Tamales with Molé Sauce



Sherlock Holmes style Hat

VITA

James Dailey Mason

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: AESTHETIC AUTHENTICITY: CONSUMMATORY EXPERIENCE IN THE
MARKETPLACE

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Theological Studies in History of Christianity at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL in 1996.

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Marketing Consultant, Cherokee Nation Health Services, 2007-2008.

Director of Development, Graduate School of Education, University of Utah, 1996-2001.

Development Assistant, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1994 – 1996.

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Name: James Dailey Mason

Date of Degree: July, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: AESTHETIC AUTHENTICITY: CONSUMMATORY EXPERIENCE IN
THE MARKETPLACE

Pages in Study: 101 Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Sociology

Scope and Method of Study: A qualitative investigation of consumer understanding of
differing constructs of authenticity.

Findings and Conclusions: “Aesthetic Authenticity” is a construct that is possessed by
objects or brands which incorporate a carefully controlled image, use symbolic
imagery in their advertisements and other efforts to control brand image, have a
close connection to consumer self-identity, and incorporate linkages to
consummate experience.

Authenticity is a “cornerstone of contemporary marketing” (Brown, et al. 2003), however
there is very little agreement in the literature. The concept has been linked to
branding, consumer behavior, been used to legitimize products and services and
adds to the market value of consumer products and cultural goods alike. In these
varied contexts, evidence suggests that both researchers and consumers have
varying ideas of what authenticity actually means. Indexical (spatio-temporal
linkage), iconic (containing attributes of originality) and existential authenticity
are current constructs of authenticity in the literature, however they are
inadequate. Building on this extant base, I suggest aesthetic authenticity as an
additional construct which has been a part of the marketing literature for at least a
decade but which is only vaguely articulated therein.

This dissertation develops an authenticity typology which includes and addresses the
existential and aesthetic aspect of the concept. Using a grounded theory approach
(Charmaz, 2005) it uses guided interviews where subjects categorize sets of
“authentic” products and services with little or no researcher input about what or
how many categories are present. Afterwards, subjects are interviewed about their
rationales for the categorizations they have made. I discover how consumers
identify authenticity in the marketplace, its linkage to brand associations and its
relationship to their social identities. The data provides a clearer and more
complete typology of the authenticity concept. It also lays the groundwork for
future research on the concept including scale development and other
managerially relevant areas.

ADVISER’S APPROVAL: Dr. Jean VanDelinder
